

LAND, CASTE AND POLITICS IN INDIAN STATES

Edited by
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CONTENTS

Contributors	...	4
Prologue	...	5
<i>by Manoranjan Mohanty</i>		
1. Class Caste and Land in Indi : An Introductory Essay	...	9
<i>by Gail Omvedt</i>		
2. Class, Caste and Power in Rural Orissa	...	51
<i>by Jaganath Pathy</i>		
3. Caste, Land and Power in Uttar Pradesh : 1775-1970	...	62
<i>by Rajendra Singh</i>		
4. Caste and Politics in West Bengal	...	88
<i>by Partha Chatterjee</i>		
5. Caste and Polity in Bihar	...	102
<i>by Hiranmay Dhar, Shaibal Gupta, Nandadulal Roy, and Nirmal Sengupta</i>		
6. Punjab : Development and Politics	...	114
<i>by Amarjeet Singh Narang</i>		
7. Rural Politics in Gujarat	...	134
<i>by Ghanshyam Shah</i>		
8. Land, Caste and Politics in Andhra Pradesh	...	156
<i>by C. V. Subba Rao</i>		
Index of Names	...	165

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PROLOGUE

TOWARDS A NEW POLITICAL ECONOMY

Caste is not merely a cultural category. Treatises on caste which go into the origin of the Brahminic notions of purity and pollution have done well in explaining the caste idea or the cultural values underlying the caste system. But they do not throw much light on the nature of the social relations which have evolved among caste groups over time.

Some empirically-oriented sociologists have gone into the questions of status and power relations among groups and subgroups of various castes. These studies have proliferated day by day in India with research agencies showing great interests in supporting these studies and scholars using the opportunity to establish their credentials as field researchers. Many of these studies are of enormous value because of their presentation of the concrete picture of single villages. Until then vague impressions regarding either stagnation or transformation of village India prevailed in intellectual quarters. The findings of these studies were not uniform. In some studies the power of the numerically largest caste group was found to be rising while in others it was not so. In some cases status and wealth converged in others they did not. As to who wielded power in the village a few sociologists who asked the question also found diverse answers.

Undoubtedly these studies enlarged our understanding of caste as a significant social category. But these studies had some preoccupations. Almost all of them had the liberal paradigm of modernisation within which they sought to understand caste. Their central question was whether caste contributed to or hindered modernisation. In a developing country like ours to ask such a question was but natural. The diversity of findings taken together did not suggest any conclusive pattern. Some investigators went a step further to ask what was happening to caste in rural India. Even they adopted the same paradigm.

The questions these sociologists did not ask were at least equally if not more important. What was the social basis of caste? How to place it in the evolution of agrarian class structure? What was the nature of the interaction between political power and caste both in the formal as well as the informal political process?

Some sociologists did probe into caste-class relations. But the modernisation paradigm, a mechanical understanding of class and an inability to relate the micro-study with the overall character of the national social process severely inhibited their enquiry. Besides committing the errors of empiricism, they gave a false signal of having done what needed to be done, namely relating caste with class. Hence in spite of the explosion of caste studies in recent times important questions were deferred still.

The political scientist arrived a bit late on the field. He wanted to catch up. Just as the economists of modernisation determined the parameters of the investigation for the sociologist, the latter did it for the political scientist. The plethora of studies on caste and politics also adopted the modernisation paradigm. But to be fair to our discipline it must be stated that they focussed on the 'political' side of modernisation. But what was it? It was the electoral behaviour of the newly enfranchised masses of free India. The behavioural approach wanted us to find the determinants of voting behaviour and we were to find out the extent of caste influence on voting. A few of us who claimed greater sophistication had applied the tools of functionalism to gauge the secularisation of a parochial category called caste.

The political scientist of this period maintained his interest in caste at a more superficial level than the sociologist. Although both remained empiricist in their orientations, while questions of power and the interaction between class and caste engaged the attention of some sociologists, political scientists were more interested in voting behaviour. And what is more some of us in our enthusiasm to recommend the stabilisation of the existing electoral process put forward theories on modern behaviour of caste groups and a new functionality of the caste phenomenon. The new political alignment of caste groups and factions in castes was worth noting. But it was not related to what was happening in the economic structure.

Marxist theoreticians have not paid enough attention to caste and similar issues in India. Marxist historians who have opened up new horizons on understanding ancient and medieval India have not considered this question of much importance either. Marxist organisations and their ideologues find it easy to explain caste behaviour simply as a manifestation of class behaviour. The history of class formation in India is itself full of unanswered questions which are being debated. The nature of pre-capitalist formations in India and the relevance of caste to it is one of these questions. The cultural category of Brahminic values and the evolution of its structural forms is another. The agrarian structure and its relationship with pre capitalist political power in kingdoms and village communities is yet another question. How was all this affected by invasion by outsiders, uprisings and turmoil? In the context of modern India how have policies initiated from above affected the social structure and the relations among the various groups in the village? What has been the impact of various social and political movements in rural India on the group relations?

Hesitation to grant a degree of autonomy to political and cultural factors by some Marxists and the tendency to explain every situation only by the omnibus category of class struggle is responsible for the inadequate efforts by Marxists to comprehend the caste question. The method of class analysis is one of the most valuable tools for understanding social development. But it should not make us so easygoing and simplistic as not to go for a deeper understanding of categories like caste. On the one hand, the liberal sociologists commit the mistake of divorcing class from caste altogether. On the other hand, many Marxists dismiss the caste category as only a manifestation of class. Method of dialectical and historical materialism impels us to take cognizance of empirical

reality and place it within the historical context. Already many Marxists recognize the need to comprehend caste, race, tribe etc. in this light.

Thus many intellectual questions regarding the phenomenon of caste remain to be further investigated. When the frequency of caste violence suddenly started increasing in the late 1970's and caste base of some political parties became evident the social scientist was caught redhanded since he could not provide convincing explanation for these trends. The urgency for developing a new political economy of rural India became widely felt, especially in the context of intense agrarian tensions generated by, among other things, the development strategy. There is a need to diagnose both the basis of caste in the structure of land relations and its superstructural dimensions in politics emphasising various levels of interaction between economy, culture and politics. The new political economy has to relate the specific social process with the overall national process without either missing the peculiarities and unevenness in the regional situations or the nature of the developing political economy in India. The emerging power relations in the countryside and their countrywide implications are the focus of the new political economy. This volume is a modest attempt in that direction.

This initiative by the Delhi University Political Science Association and its journal *Teaching Politics* unaided by any research agency has succeeded in involving some active scholars from various parts of the country in producing this collection. The Introduction by Gail Omvedt presents a provocative theoretical framework and outlines the all India picture. Our attempt to identify the nature of the social situation in various regions of India has more or less borne fruit since the seven State studies provide a fairly representative selection. One of our original objectives was to provide the overall picture of each State in a simple and introductory fashion for use by scholars and activists of other areas of the country. This was to curb not only empiricism but also a new intellectual parochialism developing in regional studies in India. Some of the papers have gone further to report on the author's empirical findings which only enrich the volume. All views presented here are those of the individual authors and they are also responsible for the accuracy of their data. The DUPSA gratefully acknowledges their contribution to this new academic movement for developing creative theory in contemporary India. If responses to this volume are encouraging we will be happy to plan another volume with more theoretical discussion on this question and additional State studies.

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Class, Caste and Land in India : An Introductory Essay*

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"Farmers' agitations" and "atrocities on *Harijans*" — these seem to be vying for space on the front pages of India's daily newspapers. On the one hand, in the name of "peasants unite!" rural militants have been blocking roads, burning train stations and going on hundreds-of-mile long marches. On the other hand, caste, the age-old source of rural disunity, has been apparently coming to the fore in brutal attacks on low-caste labourers in Belcchi, Bajitpur, Pipra and in the massive pogroms in Marathwada, the campaign against giving land to the landless at Kanjhawala, and the month-long battle of *dalits* and caste Hindus in Gujarat. And such agitations and attacks are occurring not only in the more feudal, backward and impoverished areas of the countryside such as Bihar but even more in the "modern" and capitalistically developed regions like Gujarat, Punjab and Maharashtra.

One thing seems clear and that is that though caste is a crucial factor in these struggles, the current events are a disproof of western-derived academic theories of politics which have emphasized the integrative and even "democratic" role of caste. Such theories, with their functionalist and idealist biases, have seen peasants as passive, villagers as torn only by factional conflicts among the rural elite, and untouchables and other low-caste labourers as too helpless and dependent to revolt. The farmers' agitations and the organizations behind them — however much they may be in the interest of and led by the rich farmers — have shown peasants ready to surpass local factionalism to go into battle. And in the case of the attacks on *dalits*, Marxist analyses have clearly shown the class factors lying behind these, the struggle between sharecroppers and landlords or labourers and *kulaks* and — a qualitatively new factor — the increasing readiness of the most suppressed and proletarianized sections of Indian society to rise up and fight for their rights even in the face of the most brutal repression.

*The major formulations of this paper were initially developed in an article coauthored with Bharat Patankar, 'The dalit Liberation Movement in the Colonial Period' and revised and elaborated in course of our mutual discussions.

Similarly, the old models of caste-based "vote banks" and politics as a game of the village "dominant caste" are clearly incapable of explaining the varying political alignments of the last decade — the swings from Indira Gandhi to Janata and back again — or the underlying factors which are influencing voting. The new forms of political parties, in particular the Congress (I) and the BJP, their tendencies/efforts to become cadre parties while building up a single "supreme leader" their efforts to make ideological appeals to all sections of the population, reveal the inadequacy of the old political model of the Congress and its opposition parties. These old models were themselves based on a particular image of the Indian village (in which class factors were much less significant than caste-based alignments and in which political, social and economic life was solidly controlled by a "dominant caste elite") which itself is no longer true: the village is now revealed to be increasingly torn by a complex of class and caste contradictions which are bursting out everywhere on the national political arena.

So those who claimed that "class" and "class struggle" have no place in the very unique society of India have been silenced by the emergent historical reality. However, the traditional Marxist analyses are also showing themselves as inadequate. The view that though there are class differences among the peasantry (rich, poor, landless etc.) these are nonantagonistic and the main contradiction is between "peasants" as a group and landlords has left the major communist parties tailing after the rural rich rather than building an independent political movement based on the rural toilers. And the idea that in regard to atrocities "caste is only a form, the reality is class struggle" does not explain *why* the form of caste has become so important, *what* its material base is, and how the revolutionary movement should deal with this.

Similarly it has to be admitted that though there is a heroic tradition in India of both anti-caste and left-led peasant and agricultural labourer struggles, these have largely also failed to deal with the present crisis — or rather, shown their limitations. For "atrocities" and caste-riots have taken place not only in the land of Gandhi but also in areas such as Tamilnadu and Maharashtra where a radically anti-caste non-Brahman movement has been strong; "atrocities against *Harijans*" occur even in Kerala where feudal relations seem to have been wiped out the most thoroughly and that too under left leadership which participated in anti-untouchability as well as peasant movement, *vethbegar* and landlord-*kulak* dominance continues in severe form in Telengana, centre of India's biggest peasant revolt in history; *dalits* appear to be the most suppressed in Bihar, earliest homeland of the *Kisan Sabha*; and it appears that in spite of its strength left in Bengal has made little progress in taking decisive anti-feudal steps in the countryside. All of this suggests an inability to carry forward these traditions of struggle under the new conditions of changing agrarian relations in independent India.

What is the connection between "class" and "caste" in rural India today, and what is its role in relation to both the old and developing forms of agrarian relations of production? This collective undertaking presents articles giving detailed analyses of states from every region of India that shed important light on this question. This article is an initial attempt to present a theoretical and overall view.

1. Theoretical Background

The origins of the caste system in India are shrouded in mystery. The most predominant and widely popular theory traces it to the Aryan invasion of India and links it to the process by which the invaders could subordinate the indigenous inhabitants and integrate them as peasants and slaves within a stratified society. Thus it is believed that the "twice-born" castes, Brahmans, Ksatriyas Vaisyas, are descended primarily from the original Aryans or later invaders from outside, while the masses of Sudras, Atisudras and tribal peoples, the majority of Indian peasants and workers, are descended primarily from the conquered non-Aryan natives. In south India, where there were few castes recognized as Ksatriyas and even aristocratic landlords were often classified as Sudras, the majority of the population are thought to be non-Aryans or Dravidians, while in north India a larger section are considered of Aryan origin while only tribals, ex-untouchables and other low castes emphasize their non-Aryan and indigenous descent.

This "popular" — level theory was originated first by racist-oriented British and European scholars and in particular by H. H. Risley, a British Census Commissioner. Such scholars argued that there were basic racial and physical differences among the various castes. This "Aryan theory" was quickly taken over by Indians, at first by Brahman intellectuals who sought to use it to prove their superiority over the low castes within India and their racial equality with the "white men", and later by cultural radicals such as Jotirao Phule and the leaders of non-Brahman movement in Tamilnadu who stressed the equality and moral superiority of the original non-Aryans or "Dravidians."¹ Of all non-Brahman intellectuals and leaders, in fact only B. R. Ambedkar really rejected the racial theory (Ambedkar, 1946, 1960). But as an explanation of caste, the "Aryan theory" is inadequate. It does not explain why the Indo-European invasions should have given rise to caste in India only not elsewhere, nor why caste seems to be strongest in the areas least affected by such invasions (i.e. South India). In addition, as Morton Klass has pointed out, there is no proof at all of any massive invasions by racially distinct groups in the 2000-1000 BC period, and there seem to have been elements of traits connected with caste that were indigenous to the pre-Aryan Indian societies. (Klass, 1980)

Klass's, recent important book, *Caste: The Emergence of the South Asian Social System*, puts forward an alternate hypothesis. He argues that caste originated with the first development of an economic surplus in India and that it was the means by which tribal societies consisting of originally equalitarian clans adjusted to the inequality generated by this surplus. This would place the origin of caste at the very beginning of Indian class society, with the first development of settled rice and wheat agriculture in the subcontinent leading to the rise of the Indus valley cities. In this view, the system was adjusted to and modified by Aryans and other invaders, but the theories these Sanskritic-speaking people formulated to explain it only served to give it a firm ideological foundation, and hardly prove that they themselves "invented" caste.

Whatever may be the case, whether it had its beginnings with Aryan invasions or earlier, it is clear that caste in India has existed for a very long period and that it has survived through major socio-historical changes. For India has certainly not been an "unchanging" society from 2000 BC or 1000 BC to the

present. It has undergone major changes in systems of production, forms of political rule and culture. In Marxist terms, we may say that caste has coexisted with several *different* modes of production, from the very earliest ones which we would define essentially as tributary modes through the feudal period² up to the present when capitalism has come to dominate and caste, though it is taking on new forms, is clearly far from vanishing. From this we can conclude that caste cannot be identified with any *single* mode of production as such, though certainly the existence of a surplus and economic inequality is necessary for its existence (in both these characteristics it is similar to patriarchal structures and women's oppression). At the same time, caste had a very different relation to Indian feudalism and existed then in a very different form than it does today in the period of rising capitalism, and this also has to be taken into account in analyzing the nature of caste, class and land in India.

An analysis should begin with some basic definitions. First, what is *caste*? Though there is often violent disagreement among scholars, Marxist and otherwise, about the origins of caste, its relation to the rest of the social structure and in particular to the economy, there is a surprising amount of agreement about what caste actually *is*. Caste is a system in which a person's membership in the society is mediated through his/her birth in a particular group which is assigned a particular status within a broad social hierarchy of such groups; this group has particular accepted occupation or range of occupations and only within it can a person marry and carry on close social relations such as interdining (*roti-beti vyavahar*). This group is a corporate group that has certain defined rules of behaviour for its members and exercises some degree of authority over them, including the right to expel those who defy its authority. A person is born into such a group, is a lifelong member (unless expelled) and is not able to legitimately join any other group.

As many scholars, from Irawati Karve to Morton Klass have pointed out, this most basic group or unit of the system is not actually the *jati* or "caste" but rather the subcaste or *potjati* (Klass refers to them as "marriage-circles"). These are the actual functioning units of the system which regulate marriage, and are known to their members by special names (e.g. Vellalas; Somvanshi Mahars). Their membership has been estimated at a median of between 5000 and 15,000 each (Marriott and Inden, 1974: 98⁵). In turn, these groups are known to the broader society largely by the name of their *jati* (e.g. as Vellalas or Mahars). During the feudal period, when the caste system was maintained by the feudal state, the *jatis* themselves had a concrete social existence as the basic unit of the social division of labour, (and the *jati* name most commonly was an "occupational" name, meaning "peasant", "barber", "potter" or the like), but today the *jatis* exist only as clusters of subcastes. In turn these *jatis* claimed and still claim a certain broader status as Brahmans, Ksatriyas, Vaisyas or Sudras within the all-India hierarchical *varna* system.

It, therefore, seems that caste is primarily a *social* phenomenon; the subcaste which has been the most enduring element within it is primarily a unit of the social system of kinship, though the broader *jati* was for a long time the basic unit of the social division of labour (i.e., part of the economy) and even today caste still has definite economic effects.

In contrast it is tempting to say that *class* is basically an *economic* phenomenon — and this is indeed how most people view the issue. However, we feel this is a vulgarization of Marxism. Class should be basically defined in terms of the *social* Marxist concept of the social *relations of production*, and this is not such a simple concept. Of course it is commonly known that Marx himself never identifies the “economic” or the “base” simply with technology or the labour process (which he normally calls the “forces of production”) but rather sees this as a combination of forces and relations of production. Perhaps the most comprehensive definition comes from Volume III of *Capital* :

The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of ruler and ruled as it grows directly out of the production itself, and in turn reacts upon it as a determining element. Upon this, however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community, which grows up out of the production relations themselves, thereby simultaneously its specific political form. It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the means of production to the direct producers, a relation always naturally corresponding to labour and thereby its social productivity, which reveals the innermost secret, and the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence. This does not prevent the same economic basis — the same from the standpoint of its main conditions — due to innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural environment, racial relations, external historical influences etc. from showing infinite variations, and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances. (Marx, 19; 791-2)

The complication here has two aspects. First, the “relations of production” are really given two definitions in this passage, first in terms of the form “in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of the direct producers”, and second in terms of the relation of the “owners of the means of production to the direct producers” — and these two may not be precisely the same (e.g. tool-owning artisans exploited via the jajmani system!). Second, the form “in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out” in many societies may concretely include economic, social and political factors mingled together, while Marx is specifically taking only the *economic aspect* of this relation or form to define the “social relations of production”, and this is often something of a formalistic abstraction.

Marx himself of course recognized and stressed that it is really only with the birth of capitalist society that the *economy* comes to exist as a concrete, phenomenon separate from the political, social and other levels of society. By the same token it is only with capitalism that classes come into existence as phenomena clearly and apparently defined first at the economic level, the level of production. In contrast, in precapitalist societies, classes which are defined in terms of the relations of production and always exist wherever there is a surplus “pumped out” of the direct producers, and enveloped along with these relations in social, religious, political and other superstructural forms.

Thus it is only in a very *formalistic* sense that we can distinguish “caste” and “class” and say that one is mainly a “social” and the other is mainly an

“economic” concept, and that both have probably co-existed in India since the beginning of the generation of a surplus and economic inequality. In concrete fact, the situation was more complex. In pre-capitalist Indian society (we may say with the full-fledged feudal period from about 600 AD), unpaid surplus labour was pumped out of direct producers via a system that was itself defined and organised in terms of caste while the subcastes were a basic unit of the kinship system, the *jati* itself was a class phenomenon and was a basic unit of the division of labour; with this, caste structured the very nature and existence of the exploiting and exploited sections. Exactly how this was so we shall try to define in the next section. But the result was that it was impossible to speak of a “caste system” and a “class structure” as separate *concrete* phenomenon; the two in fact were interwoven (thus those who say that in feudal society “class and caste coincided” in a sense are right) and in fact we should say that the Indian feudal social formation was actually based on a *caste-feudal mode of production*.³

Today, though, “class” and “caste” *are* separate, and we speak of the dominance of a simple capitalist mode of production. The reason is, that the beginning of capitalism under colonial rule not only began to create new classes (workers, bourgeoisie) but also began a process of *separating out* a “caste system” from the “class structure.” This meant on the one hand redefining and reshaping castes as a new kind of social phenomenon; it also meant redefining and reshaping classes in the rural areas as “landlords”, “tenants” and “labourers” even before the emergence of the new capitalist rural classes of kulak farmers and agricultural labourers. Today, with this redefined caste system maintained under the dominance of a capitalist mode of production, what we are faced with is a very complex mixture of caste and class, a mixture that has tremendous regional variations. Not only do more “feudal” and “capitalist” forms of classes and caste-relations mix, but castes also affect the existence of classes and vice versa though now both exist on a separate basis.

One conclusion from this is that low castes and especially the ex-untouchables (dalits) are, like women, a *specially oppressed section*, one that can and must organize independently, one whose liberation is crucial for any revolution in India. They are also a section whose majority are proletarianized toilers — agricultural labourers and workers. But as a section, their nature is different from that of the basic revolutionary class, the proletariat, and it is unscientific and misleading to speak of “caste and class” as parallel phenomena and parallel struggles in which the working class leads an “economic revolution” while the dalits lead an “anti-caste revolution”. Now, because the new form of caste is conditioned by and under the dominance of capitalism, it can only be abolished by a social revolution under the leadership of the proletariat. But at the same time, because caste still is a material reality with a material base and important economic results, because it has become in fact the primary means for dividing the toiling masses, it is equally dangerous to ignore caste, to suggest that dealing with it can be “postponed” until after the revolution or that “economic unity” can come first, and to argue that “all struggles are class struggles but they only have a caste *form*.” Caste is not only form but also concrete material content, one that now must be solved as a crucial obstacle before any revolutionary

movement. In fact, the mechanical tendency to overlook the superstructure has led to ignoring the ways that this social system of caste has historically shaped the very basis of Indian economy and society and continues to have crucial economic implications today.

In the rest of this paper we will first outline the basic structure of caste feudal society in India. Then we will summarize the changes that occurred under British rule and the varying forms of class (or "class-caste") struggle that took place then. Finally, the new class structure and the role of caste in the rural areas in the post-colonial bourgeois state will be examined with as much attention to regional variation as possible.

2. Caste-Feudal-Society

There is a broad agreement among Marxist scholars that by the time of the British conquest the Indian social formation was primarily feudal in character, though there were elements and survivals of other forms of exploitation, particularly tributary forms in the case of the Mughal empire and South India (Kosambi, Pavlov, Gough, Gardezi). There were also of course interspersed areas of tribal modes of production, and one broad region (Jharkhand) had its character defined by the fact that tribal modes prevailed for a much longer period of time (Sengupta, 1980; Singh, 1978). But in the rest of India feudalism was dominant and was characterized by the fact that the most important means of production, the land, was essentially controlled by feudal exploiting classes at the village level. Periodically the ruling states (both the Mughals and Hindu states) laid claim to "ownership" of the land but in practice were not able to enforce this; while on the other hand the main producing classes (peasants, artisans and labourers) had certain types of rights to the land and to the means of production. They were primarily subordinate tenants dependent on the village feudals for their access to the land and the performance of their functions.

But the nature of these village feudal classes and the very structuring of the relations of production they dominated were defined in terms of the caste system. To understand how this worked, we shall begin with two points made about the traditional system by non-Marxist scholars and then turn to some insights of the Russian historian V. I. Pavlov.

The first important observation is that of Andre Beteille, who has pointed out that along with the thousands of castes, there were also in fact indigenous "class" — type classifications that divided the rural population of India into four or five main socio-economic groups according to their position in the system of production. In Bengal these are *zamindars*, *jotedars* (most often big ryots or big tenants), *bargadars* (sharecroppers) and *khetmajdur*; along with these of course were merchants and artisans (Beteille, 1974 : 126). Almost identical classes can be identified in nearly every region of India. In Tamilnadu there were *mirasdars* or *kaniyachikarar* (landlords), *paykaris* (tenants), functionaries and artisans, and *adimais* and *padiyals* who were bonded labourers and field slaves (Sivkumar 1978; Gough, 1977; Mencher, 1978). In Bihar Harcourt has distinguished *ashraf* (landlords), *bakal* (village shopkeepers), *pawania* (artisans), *jotiya* (small peasants directly cultivating their land, sometimes divided into

well-to-do cultivators and sharecroppers) and 'a class of low caste landless labourers usually known by the name of the most numerous labourer caste at the local level' (Harcourt, 1977; 234-5). Other scholars speak of a basic north Indian division into *malik* (landlord), *kisan* (peasant), and *mazdur* as well as artisans and merchants (Singh, 1978; Thorner, 1976). In Maharashtra the cultivating ryots, though all of the Kunbi caste, were divided at the village level between the dominant *patil* lineage, the *kulwadis* or *uparis* (tenants, small cultivators of subordinate lineages or late arrivals); *balutedars* (artisans) and the labourers who did some balutedar work also but were generally called by their caste names of "Mahar-Mang". In all these classifications, it can be seen that there is not only a division between the exploiting classes (village landlords, merchants, priests and state officials) and others; there are also divisions among the village toilers between peasant cultivators, with peasants usually divided into two sections artisans, and labourers, and the latter divisions coincide with jati divisions.

A second point stressed by many scholars (Klass, Neale) is that due to the caste system access to produce within the village was almost never on the basis of market exchange. Rather it was through caste (jati), the services performed by the different castes and a right to a share of the produce traditionally claimed on the basis of such services. This is often described in terms of a division of the grain heap at harvest time: members of the different castes or sub-castes (from barbers to carpenters to untouchable field labourers to priests) who had performed their traditional duties throughout the year at that time claimed as their right a prescribed proportion of the grain. Besides this, they also had various other kinds of socio-economic rights, from prescribed places and tasks at village festivals to certain shares of food at specific times to (occasionally) allotment of land for self-cultivation. Of course this system did not work "automatically". In fact the allotment of the shares of grain or of other goods (along with the major share of village land, was under control of the dominant subcaste or lineage at the village level; it was these in fact who were the village feudal rulers and they are sometimes referred to as the "managerial caste" or "dominant caste."

In most cases (the traditional "zamindari" areas) these village landlords were from traditional non-cultivating castes who often derived their control over the land from its conquest by an early ancestor or its grant by a king or overlord. (Or from one-time cultivators who come to be largely non-cultivating landlords). Normally these were sharply distinguished in *varna* terms from the village toilers. In north India they were mainly "twice-born", Rajputs, Brahmans, Bhumihars. In many parts of south India the distinction was just as strong even though no castes were recognized traditionally as Ksatriyas; in Tamilnadu these landlords were mainly Brahmans or Vellalas who distinguished themselves from the exploited sections as *sat-shudras*, while in Kerala though the Nayar landlords only had a status as *shudras*, nevertheless they maintained their ritual distance from Izhava tenants and untouchable labourers by classifying all the others as some form of "excluded" caste.

In the traditional "ryotwari" areas the situation was a bit more complicated, for here it seemed that the village "dominant caste" or "managerial caste" were not in fact non-cultivating landlords but were the cultivating ryots such as

Marathas, Kammas, Reddis etc. In such cases we can see the survivals of the earlier period of a tributary mode of production when the main exploitative relations were between a majority group of peasant cultivators and the state. But with feudalization the headman (*patil, patel, gauda*) developed as an intermediary; the headman's sub-lineage became in effect the village feudal rulers and came to be non-cultivating landlords who dominated not only the artisans and labourers but also junior lineages and "guest families" of peasant cultivators. Pavlov has estimated that these headmen had the right to 15-25% of the village produce (1949, 77-80), and Perlin has shown in the case of 17th century Maharashtra that rising higher feudal families often "bought up" village level *patilki* rights to increase and centralize their landholdings (Perlin). Thus, the noncultivating landlord caste in the zamindari areas, and the headman's lineages in the ryotwari areas were in fact essentially feudal landlords; they were the lowest rung in the very extended and stratified ladder of feudal exploitation, and they along with the representatives of the feudal state at all levels enforced and maintained the caste-defined behaviour which structured the ways in which "unpaid surplus labour (was) pumped out of direct producers."

Pavlov's analysis helps to show one important way in which this structuring differed from European feudalism. This was not simply in terms of the existence of "birth-ascribed" class membership nor in terms of the fact that religious and cultural factors shaped the economic structure—all feudal societies are "ascriptive" in some sense and in all religious and political factors directly enter into production relations. The difference was in the relationships *among* toilers. In Europe, though membership in the exploited peasantry was defined by birth, there were no such birth-limits to performance of specialist functions. A peasant might do his own carpentering or other work, or there might be specialist carpenters, but even if there were a boy from a peasant family who faced no absolute barriers to entering such occupations. In various ways guilds might regulate entry into skilled crafts, but this was not part of the basic social rules. Similarly an impoverished family that lost its land might be forced to mainly work as wage-labourers (and there were in fact wage-paid field labourers in medieval Europe), but again it was only economic obstacles which placed people in such positions or prevented them from moving out of them, and not social ones which assigned them to groups who were held to be by birth and nature fit only for tasks as labourers.

In contrast, Indian caste feudalism split the exploited classes into several permanent major sections. Pavlov argues against applying the very word "peasant" to India, for essentially this reason :

If this conception is based on...personal participation in agricultural production the category will have to include sections as incomparable in social and proprietary status as the untouchables among the servants of of the community, and its upper sections which (in Maharashtra, for instance) took part in cultivating the soil. But these did not in any sense form units in a single class/estate (1978: 48).

Thus he decides to reserve the term "peasant" for "only the tillers of the soil among the upper castes who held the land as rayats" and he notes

that this section constituted only a minority of the population in contrast to the European notion of the peasant as a land-tilling majority.

Below these cultivating rayats were inferior tenants and sharecroppers of lower castes or subcastes. And along with them was another numerous section in rural society, the artisans (*kamins*, *balutedars*). They included a wide range of castes from relatively high-status goldsmiths down to leather-workers, rope-makers and others often classed as untouchables; but they were always socially and economically subordinated not only to the landlords but to most of the cultivating peasants as well. A very important fact stressed by Pavlov is that *production of the means of production* for agriculture (carts, rope, leather, iron) was carried out through the *jajmani/balutedari* system in which the craftsman was not paid in exchange for each item he produced but was considered as a village servant entitled on a ongoing, hereditary basis to rewards that included the allotment of grain at harvest time, a whole bundle of social and economic perquisites and occasionally the allotment of land for self-cultivation. In contrast to this, production of *consumption goods* such as cloth, jewellery etc. was nearly always carried on for exchange though again by members of specific castes. (Pavlov, 1978: 51-57).

The lowest of the castes within this system were usually considered untouchable on the grounds that they performed polluting occupations, and were forced to live in separate settlements outside the village boundaries. Significantly, almost everywhere there were one or two large untouchable castes who not only did specific craft duties but were also bound to the performance of *general menial labour* that included acting as general plough servants and field slaves for landlord families, carrying and fetching services for the village headmen and higher state officials, woodcutting and other general casual labour for the village.

Would village servants and labourers be called "peasants" in any sense? In fact their position was an ambivalent one. On the one hand they were *agricultural producers* in the sense that they performed functions that were crucial for agricultural production. But they had no recognized right to the land itself, and they were never considered to be "peasants" or "tillers of the soil." (Though many untouchable castes have traditions which define them as descendants of ancient native sons-of-the-soil, this was never recognised by the wider society). In contrast to European labourers and artisans, their economic position did not result from impoverishment or choice of a specialization, but was rather an ascriptive one within a system that maintained a *permanent* class of field as well as village — resident artisans.

Thus besides the exploiting classes of merchants, Brahman administrators and landlords, there were three major sections among the exploited producers in Indian feudal society; the *kisans* or peasants; the *kamins* or artisans; and the untouchable labourers. The *kisans* were almost always drawn from the main "peasant" or land-tilling caste of the region, and in fact their jati name was also frequently the word for "peasant" in a local language. They were Kunbis, Jats, Kurmis, Reddis, Vokkaligas, Kammas, Vanniyas etc. and they were always classed as shudras in varna terms. Similar in status and almost in the same category were castes whose "traditional" function was that of sheep herding,

cowherding or vegetable gardening (Malis, Yadavas, Ahirs, Dhangars etc.) but who often became cultivators and sometimes constituted the dominant caste in villages where they were a majority. It is important to note that while the kisans were mainly an exploited section of toilers, the village feudal classes (from patils to zamindars, deshmukhs and others) could be drawn from their ranks, and in this sense they had an access to economic and social mobility that other sections lacked.

Below these, the artisans were always drawn from specific castes known by the name of their function to the wider community; they were also classed as sudra in varna terms. Finally there were the labourers, who were untouchables or ati-shudra in varna terms and were the most exploited (though not the only exploited) section at the base of the system. Next to the major kisan caste, these were often numerically the biggest caste in the village and today also they represent castes that are quite big in the Indian context — Chamars, Chubras, Mahars and Mangs, Malas and Madigas, Holeyas, Puleyas, Paraiyans and Pallans.

Should these three sections be called different “classes” or different sections of a single exploited class? This may be simply a matter of terminology. What is important is that in the Indian caste-feudal mode of production, the economy was structured and the surplus “pumped out” in such a way that it maintained in existence such highly subdivided and unequally exploited sections of toilers. For anti-feudal struggles the conclusion is important: While it would be correct to say that in India as elsewhere “agrarian revolution” (the revolutionary transformation of relations of production on the land) was central to the anti-feudal struggle, this could not be attained simply through the abolition of landlordism. Rather it required a thorough attack on the caste system itself and a transformation of relations of production *within* the village and *among* the toiling masses in a way that would assure that artisans or village servants and labourers as well as the kisans could gain basic rights to the land itself and to its produce.

3. Colonial Rule and Anti-Feudal Struggles

Indian feudalism was not, of course, revolutionized by an indigenous development of capitalism. Rather it was transformed by the imposition of British colonial rule, which subordinated the entire Indian social formation to the needs of the development of capitalism in Britain. The concrete form in which colonial rule both sowed the seeds of capitalist development as well as maintained semi-feudal structures in existence in India provided the conditions under which anti-feudal as well as anti-imperialist movements developed in India. An important aspect of this was the transformation/maintenance of the caste system and its relation to the rest of the society.

First, the British abolished the pre-existing purely caste-defined access to land and other goods and imposed legal relationships of land ownership and tenancy backed up by courts operating on a definition of legal private property. Along with this, new factories, mines and plantations as well as the new schools and bureaucracy recruited their workers, students and employees on a basis of formal equality in which caste membership did not in and of itself bar any sec-

tion from entry, The state ceased to be a protector of the traditional caste hierarchy enveloped in the feudal relations of land control, and instead began to emerge as a colonial-bourgeois state. *To this extent*, new classes began to come into existence and important democratic and capitalist transformations began in India.

But these transformations were not equivalent to the abolition of caste or feudalism, and they could not automatically lead to such abolition. First, the very subordination of the Indian economy to imperialism meant that the openings in the new factories, mines and schools were limited because the growth of Indian industry was limited because the British needed only a small section of "clerks" to man their bureaucracy. In spite of formal openness, the pre-existing power, wealth and social traditions of the upper castes gave them an overwhelming advantage in filling the higher positions opening up. The majority of the population remained dependent on agriculture. And here the British alliance, for political reasons, with the land-controlling village feudals and higher landlords and with the merchants insured that their power was maintained at the local level. This was both an "economic" power (in fact they had control of the majority of the land) and a "political" power, for the limitations of the colonial administration meant that in most cases the village landlords with their gangs and their unquestioned social privileges normally exercised coercive and "judicial" powers as well. Further, within the village much production continued to be organized via the *jajmani* system which did not really wither away until after independence, and this in turn meant a continued subordination of artisans and the untouchable labourers whose traditional caste duties became a major part of the feudal unpaid labour (*vethebegar*) extracted by landlords.

But while agrarian production continued to be broadly organised on semi-feudal lines, there was one important difference. Now, the British imposition of legal rights of property ownership (however omitted and enveloped these were in traditionally defined "privileges" i.e. *watan*, *inam* and other rights) in a sense constituted for the first time classes of "landlords", "tenants" and "labourers" as legal-economic entities formally separate from the caste system, and at the same time constituted the "caste system" itself as a concretely separate system. "Caste" and "class" no longer coincided; rights were appropriated on an individual basis and no longer linked to kinship and subcaste membership; and the *jati* was no longer the basic unit of the social division of labour. The separation of the economic and social levels that is so characteristic of capitalist society began in India under colonial rule. Thus semi-feudal society under colonial rule had significantly new features.

Caste and class continued to be heavily interlinked. The educated elite was overwhelmingly drawn from the higher castes who had formerly a literate tradition, that is Brahmans, Kayasthas and others. Men from peasant and artisan castes of shudra status constituted the large majority of factory workers; while dalits could find some openings in factories or on roads and railways, generally they filled the lowest, most unskilled jobs. In the mines and plantations it was the sections most exploited in feudal society (dalits) or those outside of feudal relations altogether but brought into them by colonial rule (adivasis) who formed the bulk of the work force. Merchants and moneylenders were mainly

drawn from the vaishya castes who had traditionally performed this function, and though they gained power over peasants as *sahukars* and got control over much of the land on mortgage, they generally did not emerge as actual landlords or owners of the land but preferred simply to control the crops. It was from their ranks that an industrial bourgeoisie, ultimately a national bourgeoisie, began to take shape.

In terms of their legal position, landlords were a mixed lot : in some parts of the country they were legally defined as such (as zamindars, khotedars, talukdars etc.) while in other areas they emerged within a ryotwari structure as those who acquired large amounts of land through various means (from traditional ownership including former patil and inam rights to buying up land with advantages of education and bureaucratic connections), and farmed it mainly through tenants. Nevertheless in caste terms they were almost always drawn from the previous village feudal classes, the Rajputs, Brahmans, Bhumihars, Vellalas, Nayars, Nambudiris Deshmukhs etc.

Below these could be found a large peasant section including owner-cultivators as well as various types of tenants. These were overwhelmingly shudra in varna terms and they included both the former kisan castes as well as artisan castes. By the end of colonial rule it was clear that most of the specialist castes — many of whom had been ruined and displaced by imperialist competition — were direct cultivators of the land rather than performing their “traditional” occupation. At the same time there was a process of differentiation among this peasantry. The better off sections of owner-cultivators and the richer tenants (and these were almost all from traditional kisan castes) began to consolidate their position and even emerge as exploiters of wage labour and other forms of labour extracted from the lower castes, while others became steadily more impoverished. The rich peasants benefited from caste forms of exploitation in their villages, even though they also had an interest in opposing the caste privileges and economic power of the landlords-moneylenders-bureaucrats. Finally, at the bottom the status of the untouchable labourers continued much as before; though now it often took forms of debt-bondage and legal contracts, these untouchable servants-serfs often continued to be known by the traditional terms for field slaves (e.g. *panniyal*). Still, among the growing numbers of agricultural labourers, these were many who had originally been middle caste cultivators or artisans and were thrown now into this position by impoverishment; these often had a more free status and there were some areas (e.g. western Maharashtra, the Andhra delta) where dalits as well as caste Hindu labourers were more mobile and less bound.

Under British rule there was thus a broad *correlation* between caste and class which duplicated the main classes of the pre-colonial caste-feudal period. Nevertheless it was only a correlation, and not an identity, and in every caste there could be found some individuals who could get education, a little bit of land, some access to new opportunities. The fact that artisans and even untouchables had formal rights to land ownership, to education and to new occupations was connected with the emergence of “caste” and “class” as separate structures, separate but highly interconnected, and this was the material base on which the very complex anti-feudal struggles of the colonial period emerged.

These anti-feudal struggles included the kisan movements, the non-Brahman anti-caste movements, and the dalit and agricultural labourer movements. Of these, the kisan movements have been the most thoroughly studied; they centered around demands for abolition of *zamindari* and so primarily involved the interests of middle and rich peasants who had traditionally recognised claims to the land as tenants or as cultivators. But they also included a large number of related issues — demands for restoration of certain lands grabbed by the zamindars, opposition to forms of forced labour collectively termed as *vethbegar*, opposition to moneylending, demand for cheap access to water resources etc. — and they frequently involved poor and low caste peasants. Further, both the climatic struggles of the kisan movement — the Tebhaga movement in Bengal and the Telengana revolt — transcended the limitations of the earlier kisan movement and involved large sections of the rural poor.

Anti-caste movements, in particular the broad non-Brahman movements of South India, were also generally anti-feudal. Just as the kisan movement could generate a “united front” allying both peasants and labourers against the landlords, so the more radical non-Brahman movement could emerge as an alliance of sudras and atisudras against the high castes. For the large section of peasant and artisan masses, their oppression was in terms of caste as well as class, and as some educated sections began to develop within each jati these took leadership both in more conservative forms of organisations (caste associations which essentially accepted the caste hierarchy but sought to use caste identity to compete for a higher position within it) as well as in more radical challenges to the system itself. Toilers as well as many educated sections began to reject their hitherto accepted position as shudras within an established varna hierarchy and to see themselves as non-Brahmans or non-Aryans or *bahujan samaj* fighting an exploiting Aryan elite or *shetji-bhatji* class which had organised the caste system as a means of subjugating and dividing them. The Satyashodhak Samaj in Maharashtra and the Self-Respect movement in Tamilnadu at times took the place of the kisan sabhas in these areas and engaged in sometimes direct attacks on moneylenders or landlords as well as in a fierce challenge to the ritual status of the elite. In north India anti-caste organisations generally took a more conservative form in which the middle castes mainly claimed ksatriya status. In Bihar the middle peasant kisans organised through the Triveni Sangh as well as in the Kisan Sabha, while in northwest India the Arya Samaj and Kisan Sabhas became interwoven expressions of the (mainly Jat) kisans against their (mainly Rajput) feudal exploiters.

At the same time the untouchable labourers, inspired by such struggles but only partially included in them, began to organise separately. Movements based on their notion of themselves as the original “sons of the soil” (Adi-Andhras, Adi-Hindus, Ad-Dharm etc.) began to emerge in the 1920s, and a new term expressing a totality of socio-economic exploitation, *dalit*, began to be used from about 1930 in Maharashtra and north India. Struggles began to take place not only in the towns to claim education, legal rights or use of tanks, and temples (the Mahad satyagraha, the Vaikom satyagraha), but also in the villages to claim land (either forest land or cultivable waste), higher wages and the ending of *vethbegar*. The late 1930s, the same period in which the All-India Kisan Sabha

emerged as a united organisation under left leadership, saw the emergence of separate dalit-based agricultural labourer organizations in Bihar (led by Jagjivan Ram) and Andhra (led by Ranga and the Communists). In the same period Ambedkar founded the Independent Labour Party to link dalit, peasants and workers' struggles. Finally, people in the tribal areas, now subordinated to new consolidated feudal exploitation, also began to organize in a new fashion that stressed their identity as *adivasis*.

The Telengana revolt (1946-1950) was in many ways a climax of *all* of these movements. While both the Kisan Sabha and agricultural labour organizing had been strong in the Andhra region, in Telengana itself the mass organization which was a base for the revolt was the Andhra Mahasabha — which combined social reform, anti-caste and nationalist features. It had earlier taken up anti-untouchability and anti-vethbegar as well as cultural campaigns; and to these a new Communist leadership linked militancy and anti-landlord struggles. Thus dalits, artisans and the landless as well as substantial village landholders were involved in the revolt, and when the revolutionaries took up both abolition of zamindari and distribution of "excess land" to the landless — the first time this really was brought forward as an issue in struggle — in practice they were meeting the needs for land of the low castes as well as the cultivating kisans.

But in spite of these achievements and in spite of the long history of sustained struggles, by and large they remained under rich peasant and middle class hegemony. In the end it was Gandhi and the Congress, rather than the socialists and Communists, who maintained leadership in the anti-imperialist as well as over the anti-feudal struggles.

On the one hand this was a failure of the left, and this meant the inability of the working class, peasant and dalit forces to evolve a militant anti-feudal movement that could unite all the various aspects of the anti-caste and peasant struggles, and to combine these with the fight against imperialism. In spite of impressive local efforts under communist leadership in such places as Andhra and Kerala, there was by and large a separation of struggles at the national level. In the Kisan Sabha movement, for instance, the issue of caste and untouchability was generally ignored, the specific problems of the dalit labourers were underplayed, and there was no real analysis of the specific characteristics of Indian feudalism. The result was that the "agrarian revolution" and the "abolition of landlordism" came to mean in practice only the abolition of *zamindari* and giving land title to the *tenants* that is, to those who had some historically recognized claim to the land, primarily the middle caste kisans. For example, a final climatic resolution on the abolition of landlordism of the All-India Kisan Sabha in 1947 reads as follows :

With the abolition of landlordism all agricultural land must in the first instance be declared the property of the state and then be given in permanent ownership to actual cultivators of the soil. All agricultural labourers must have a minimum wage. All other tillers of the soil must get proprietary rights in it under their direct cultivation and cultivable waste land must be distributed among poor peasants and agricultural labourers (Rasul; 1947: 147).

Here the "actual cultivators of the soil" seem to be identified with the middle class tenants, while there is a virtual acceptance of the continuing existence of a class of agricultural labourers who do not have the same rights as other "tillers of the soil"! The evidence of the Kisan Sabha debates on this issue suggests that leaders were defining the problem of tenants and labourers in European terms, and missing most of the Indian caste-defined specificities.

One result was that dalits largely remained apart from these kisan struggles and even when they did take part they could usually not consolidate any gains in rights to the land because they were not traditionally "tillers" and there was no broader powerful peasant movement conscious enough to assure that they could win such rights. Even in the great Telengana revolt, where dalit labourers fought alongside caste Hindu kisans, the kisans who got land as tenants managed to keep their gains while the dalits and other landless who got the "ceiling land" generally lost these. Here it may be said that a general failure of the left (both of socialists and communists in this period) was both to overlook the anti-feudal character of the anti-caste and non-Brahman movements and to overlook the specific needs of dalit labourers and artisans within the broader peasant movement.

There was also a problem in combining the anti imperialist and anti-feudal fight, a problem partly related to the great difficulty the communists had in organizing and in evolving a well-defined policy. Until the middle 1930s (partly as a result of Comintern directives) the communists militantly organised the working class but did not lead any anti-British struggles and remained isolated from the national movement. Then the Socialist party was formed, as a pressure group *within* the Congress, as a left nationalist and not an independent working class party — and when the Communists switched their policy after 1935 to that of the "anti-imperialist united front" they did so by simply joining the CSP and so, in effect, accepted the same policy of "working from within". But this was at a time when in many areas independent anti-feudal and potentially anti-imperialist forces were emerging, most notably Ambedkar's Independent Labour Party in Maharashtra and Periyar's Self-Respect movement. But communist and communist-influenced cadres were directed to leave these parties and join the CSP instead even though they were getting some considerable influence at least in the case of the Self-Respect movement and were helping a movement towards a more militant anti-feudal and anti-imperialist struggle (Murugesan and Subramanyam, 1975). The result was to deprive these movements of left and working class influence, and in turn to isolate the Communists from the dalit movement in Maharashtra and the Dravidian movement in Tamilnadu. The repercussions of both are felt today. Nor did the fact of "working within" the Congress really help the leftists to topple a conservative, Gandhian leadership: rather they only helped to increase its mass base.

And on the other hand this Gandhian leadership succeeded quite brilliantly in forging a policy for a bourgeois form of anti-feudal and national struggle that did bring together under Congress leadership all aspects of the anti-feudal movements but only in a distorted, conservative and fragmentizing manner. One aspect of Gandhi's genius was in fact that he could give an all-round programme that promised something for every section of society. In the case of the kisan

movement, the Congress supported or even organized struggles where they had no choice or where they could be controlled, and always with certain conservative policies: to accept the principle of compensation and the ultimate right of landlords, to avoid "violence", etc. (Desai, 1978). At the same time it sought to avoid connecting the kisan movement with that of the issues of labourers. In turn the Congress very cautiously encouraged a limited form of organizing agricultural labourers but only (under Jagjivan Ram) where this was useful as a counter to a left-led Kisan Sabha. But for the dalits as such, Gandhi's main emphasis was to avoid their economic issues entirely; to avoid also any militant action against caste oppression as such; and in fact to avoid organizing them altogether except as "Harijans" who were objects of paternalistic sympathy and "uplift" from caste Hindus who were consciously given control of the organizations such as the Harijan Sevak Sangh. The brilliance of Gandhi's "constructive programme", (from the view point of the bourgeoisie) was that it provided something for the dalits and those who were motivated by their plight, but only in a way that increased their sub-ordination to the rural elite and diverted them from radical struggles. In other words, the Congress policy almost consciously fostered disunity among the various sections of the toiling masses while at the same time preaching a harmony with the exploited; while the left led many militant struggles and sought to intensify contradictions in the countryside according to their understanding but failed to build up a militant unity of all sections of the oppressed.

Thus the promise inherent in the mighty Telengana revolt, in the all-round participation of Communists in anti-landlord and anti-untouchability struggles among agricultural labourers and peasants in such areas as Andhra and Kerala, or in the attempt of Ambedkar in the late 1930s to formulate a programme to unite workers, peasants and dalits remained unfulfilled. Congress hegemony was maintained; the kisan movement ended up serving the needs of the rich peasants; the non-Brahman movements fell under middle class leadership and the dalit and anti-caste movements in general failed to become a thorough dalit liberation movement. When independence was won in 1947 it was under the domination of the bourgeoisie and in the form of a bourgeois state.

4. Caste and Class in Post-Colonial India

A close look at the notorious "atrocities against Harijans" that seem to be going on everywhere today will reveal the significant changes that have occurred in Indian agriculture since independence. The cases of Kilvenmani, Belcchi, Bajitpur, Pipra may appear to be feudal in the violent, goonda nature of the onslaught, but the very ferocity of the attacks shows the growing rural tensions and the degree to which dalit labourers are beginning to challenge the village powerholders. In the case of Kanjhawala, Marathwada, and now Gujarat, a new phenomenon is evident: along with riots and pogroms, are sustained organized campaigns, demonstrations, mass-oriented slogans designed to win over the caste Hindu toilers against the dalits. And everywhere a simple question reveals a crucial difference from the feudal, pre-independence period: *who is attacking the dalits?* Now it is no longer Brahmans, Rajputs, Deshmukhs, Vellalas or high-caste landlords, but most often the middle castes, the new rich farmers, those

who were once middle peasants and tenants fighting against landlords and who now still call themselves *bahujan samaj*, *kisan* and *shetkari*. Those who were once allies of dalits in the anti-feudal struggle now appear to be the main enemy.

These attacks themselves show the coming of capitalist relations in agriculture. They indicate that the main lines of conflict are no longer between middle and low-caste peasants on one side and high-caste landlords on the other, but are now between the rich farmers and the agricultural labourers-poor peasants. And they show that the caste structure of rural India has changed in this new emerging class struggle, caste is one of the strongest weapons which the rich are using to divide and attack the rural poor.

The process of change in agricultural relations of production and in the relation between class and caste has taken place in a highly uneven fashion throughout India. Therefore we will first outline the broad character of this change, and then in the final section try to deal briefly with the regional variations which form the background for the various papers in this volume.

With independence, a new bourgeoisie came into power in the Indian state, and after the repression of the peasant revolt in Telengana and other waves of popular discontent, it began to implement land reforms designed to change the agrarian structure in the interests of the bourgeoisie. Throughout the 1950s, the major demand of the Kisan Sabha movement, the demand for the abolition of zamindari, was implemented, though in a slow and halting way. Intermediaries were abolished in the former zamindari areas (though they were always left with enough land and compensation to survive as big farmers) and tenancy acts in the ryotwari areas served a similar purpose of removing a major basis of power of former non-cultivating Brahmans and other high-caste landlords though they hardly touched the lands of the "cultivating" castes (e.g. Maharashtra). These laws laid the basis for the former rich peasants and big tenants to emerge as the main landholding elite in the villages, and put pressure on big labourers to farm their lands "directly", that is by hired agricultural labourers, rather than giving it out on tenancy. As a result tenancy declined significantly between 1951 and 1961, and while it has more or less stayed at the same level since 1961 (by 1971 17% of rural households were taking land on tenancy and 9.25% of land was taken on lease) much of this is capitalist tenancy in which the land is taken by middle and rich farmers (See Table 1). (While some of this decline in tenancy may be an underestimation due to new motives for "concealed tenancy", village studies do not show much more actual tenancy). Similarly the percentage of the rural work force who are agricultural labourers has risen from 16% in 1951 to 31% in 1971; the change has been most dramatic between 1961 and 1971, and this does not include people who work part time as labourers and slightly more on their own land (Omvedt, 1980).

The process of actual proletarianization in agriculture — of poor peasants and artisans losing their land — has undoubtedly been a slow one. For it is taking place in a post-colonial country caught in the grips of imperialism in which industrialization has grown only very slowly and in a capital-intensive way that is incapable of absorbing labour-power displaced from the land. It is within this context also that we have to see the various land-ceiling acts (passed mainly in two waves, 1961 and 1971, and implemented very haltingly) and other measures

claiming to meet the demands of the landless for land by providing forest land, cultivable waste and other land to the rural poor. Unlike the Zamindari Abolition measures, these are generally taken to be failures; certainly only a small proportion of the estimated surplus land has been distributed. Unlike the Zamindari Abolition Acts, also, these are not classic bourgeois reforms in the interest of capitalist agricultural development, but rather go against the immediate interests of all big land-owners, capitalist and feudal alike. Nevertheless, it may be argued that such measures have played a role in slowing down absolute proletarianization (and so also in pacifying the readiness to revolt of the poor), for the number of rural families who do not own land (according to NSS statistics) has dropped from 22% in 1953 to 9.6% in 1971. Nevertheless proletarianization is going on in a somewhat different fashion, for the number of families who do not cultivate land has risen, by the same statistics, from 11% to 27%. These families include landless labourers, landless artisans, and those working in other rural wage-earning jobs (contract work, construction, truck-driving, etc.); many rent out the small plots of land they own or give them to relatives, but only about 1.2% own enough land to survive as non-cultivating landlords. In addition, are an even larger number of agricultural labourers, small artisans and other rural workers who both cultivate their tiny plots and work for wages. Thus the type of proletarianization that is developing in rural India is one in which most rural wage earners own or cultivate small plots of land, maintain milk buffaloes and cows, or have other auxiliary sources of income — all of which serve to maintain them on the land in a period in which industrial jobs are not sufficiently available, and to cheapen their labour power.

Along with this process, the ending of the jajmani system in large sections of India, the ending of the previous forms of dalit bondage (the “village work” such as carrying away dead cattle and other services for the big farmers) in many areas, the greater mobility of large numbers of poor families in search of work (from village to village daily, seasonally in the case of many jobs including construction, migrant harvest work etc.), even the ending of debt-bondage of “contract labourers in many areas—all this has meant that gradually the relationship between the labourers and the rich farmers has become more and more commercialized, less and less feudal and patronage-oriented, and more and more one of open capitalist exploitation.

Concurrently the bourgeoisie state has taken a number of measures to promote technological development in agriculture and insure credit and other infrastructural facilities to the rich farmers. The promotion of irrigation (by 1978 this covered about 30% of the land area), agricultural extension programmes, the promotion of co-operatives, steps taken to insure credit facilities (most notably beginning from the bank nationalization in 1969) and the whole set of measures including new seeds and fertilizer facilities associated with the “green revolution” have all been part of this process. And these have all helped the new rich peasants to emerge as genuine capitalist farmers producing for the market and earning a significant profit from their land. With much regional variation, agricultural growth has been an average of 2.7% a year between 1951 and 1978—higher until 1967, then slowing down some with the all-round economic crisis between 1967 and 1976 then picking up somewhat after 1975-76,

In the villages of the more "advanced" states in particular, the rich farmers have been aided in consolidating and modernizing their power by an associated set of government measures — setting up and supporting new gram panchayats, village cooperatives, new educational associations, dairy societies and a whole set of village associations which have generally been controlled by the rich farmers but have served as reservoirs of patronage and other powers by which to maintain their dominance over the lower castes, poor peasants and labourers.

Indeed, the democratic rights given in the bourgeois constitution as well as the welfare measures of the bourgeois state — education, reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and many "Backward Castes", measures like the Untouchability Offences Act and the Protection of Civil Rights Act, measures giving land to the poor, the right to vote itself — have had a very complex effect. On the one hand, they have served finally to disassociate "caste" from the near-absolute correlation it had previously with class: now small middle class sections developing in all the low castes had some opportunity to consolidate their position and move ahead. Now indeed even significant sections from among the dalits and labouring castes might make use of anti-untouchability acts, measures giving them land or cows or other facilities for tiny gains, this in turn gives a base for the view that the state is indeed a "neutral" body, standing above society, even standing above their local class oppressors and occasionally helping them. This in fact has been the base for the continued appeal of the Congress and Indira Gandhi to the rural poor. But at the same time, the fact that very few members from low castes are in a position to take advantage of their rights, the fact that many forms of untouchability remain universal throughout rural India (separate living quarters and separate water), the fact that caste remains the major unit within which marriage and social relations take place, the fact that members of the middle-caste landholding "peasant" castes are much better placed to take advantage of education, employment and government facilities — all of this meant that caste continues to have a high correlation with economic position. Most dalits and adivasis and most members of artisan castes are as poor and as low in the social-economic hierarchy as before, and the rural bureaucrats (members of panchayats, cooperative societies, government officials, the police etc.) continue to be drawn mainly from the rural elite.

These processes have had important effects on caste organizations. During the colonial period when "caste" began to emerge as a separate social phenomenon, the middle class and educated members of almost every *jati* had become involved in the formation of "caste association" — organizations which tried to unite the different sub-castes within the *jati*, to reform accepted behaviour along sanskritized lines, to promote education and generally fight for a higher place within the social hierarchy. These caste associations had always existed alongside the more radical anti-caste movements of non-Brahmans and others. Now in the post-colonial period, such caste associations if anything intensified their activity. Social scientists now began to stress the emergence of castes as "competing groups" of caste-linked "vote banks" in the countryside, and they began to observe the ways in which the bourgeois and kulak members of various

castes were appealing to caste identity to keep members of their "own caste" lined up behind them and split away from forming class solidarity with toilers of different castes. In the pre-independence period, broad semi-caste organizations of the middle castes (e.g. the non-Brahman movements) and the dalit organizations both had a radical anti-feudal direction. Now among the middle castes the radical element has vanished, only the conservative caste associations and caste appeals remains, while only among the dalits do certain caste-based organizations (e.g., Dalit Panthers, Dalit Sangarsha Samitis, even Republican Party) continue to have a dual character and radical and liberationist thrust. The reason is that only the dalits and similar groups remain almost entirely proletarianized (their middle class section was primarily one of petty bourgeois employees, rather than property-holding exploiters of labour power), while among the middle castes economic differentiation are now qualitatively different : aside from the employed sections some have become capitalist farmers, many are middle peasants, while large numbers are poor peasants and labourers. The rich farmer sections no longer have any radical or anti-feudal interests at all.

In very general terms, ignoring regional variations for a moment, we can define the new shape of agrarian classes and their caste composition (see Omvedt, 1980 for empirical data). First about 15% of all rural families can be classed as rich farmer families, including capitalist farmers, capitalist landlords, a minority of feudal landlords existing in more backward areas, and families who also include merchants and rural employees. In caste terms this section includes both the traditional feudal classes (Brahmans, Rajputs, Vellalas, etc.) as well as the middle *kisan* castes. But it is the *kisan* castes who are now dominant among them (there are only a few, minute proportion, a family from artisan caste or dalit background in this class) especially in the more capitalist, regions, where Patidars, Marathas, Jats, Vokkaligas, Lingayats, Kammas, Reddis etc. seem almost equivalent to the new kulak farmers.

These rich farmers have an ambivalent, almost dual political character. On the one hand the proportion of ex-tenants and peasants among them, the fact that they have a heritage of struggle against landlords and the upper castes, allows them to take on a surface appearance of being "peasants" (*kisans*, *shetkari*, *bahujan samaj*) and leaders, not simply oppressors, of the rural masses. Their role in the new capitalist institutions of dominance (gram panchayats co-operatives etc), the fact that they are now largely educated, their ability to exercise a sophisticated, coopting form of rural power in which some patronage is dispensed and some members of low castes are given a place, is part of this. But on the other hand, their own background as village power-holders and their readiness to take on even the most brutal feudal traits of the classes they once fought against means that they are also ready to exercise their power in the most corrupt, violent and gangster forms. Similarly, their relative caste homogeneity in many regions means they often are able to put on an appearance of being less "casteist", but this is the section that most strongly uses caste associations and caste appeals to rally people behind them, that relies on kinship and caste ties for "influence" in education, employment and other concessions, and gives the strongest support to all the religious and cultural institutions that uphold casteism. Their specific class interests lead them into a dual political battle, facing

the urban industrial bourgeoisie on the one hand in claiming more credit and higher prices (though here their contradiction is non-antagonistic) and facing the rural semi-proletariat on the other. Generally they attempt to use a rhetoric of "peasant unity" to win over middle peasants and sometimes poor peasants to their side, but with this also they use caste ties and appeals to win over the poor peasants and agricultural labourers of their own caste in dividing and concentrating their attack on dalit labourers.

Middle peasants, about 25% of all rural families, are again primarily of kisan caste background but include a small but significant proportion of artisan castes and other allied castes and even some dalits. Though they are continually threatened with problems of unemployment, price-rise, and with the corruption and bossism of the rich farmers, their own aspirations as petty-property holders and their caste ties with the rich farmers at present mainly lead them to tail after this class.

Finally, the poor peasants and agricultural labourers, the proletarianized rural majority, perhaps 60% of rural households, are the *most divided in Caste terms*. They include not only dalits and adivasis, but Muslims and other minorities, and members of all the former Hindu sudra castes, both artisans and the traditional kisan castes. In capitalist areas (such as western Maharashtra) one can find that not only are the "dominant" caste like Marathas fully differentiated in class terms, but in each village practically every *clan* of this caste may be equally differentiated, including both rich farmers, middle peasants and landless agricultural labourers. On an all-India basis, the 1974-75 Rural Labourer Enquiry showed that of 30% of households classed as rural labourer families (meaning that over half their income came from agricultural or other wage labour), some 37% were Scheduled Castes, 10% Scheduled Tribes and the rest "others" — and that these were almost equally likely to be landed or landless (Scheduled Tribes were somewhat more likely to have land, Scheduled Castes somewhat less likely).

Thus a large "Semi-proletarian" section is emerging that cuts across caste lines — but these divisions run deep. Though it has the greatest objective *need* of all the rural classes to destroy casteism, its history and material conditions make this difficult. Both dalits and savarnas may be agricultural labourers, but there is a difference. Dalits who are wage labourers have most often risen out of a position of even worse feudal bondage and have done so through their fighting anti-feudal movements. Savarnas (whether former artisans or former peasants) in contrast have often experienced a *loss* of economic position that is upsetting in a different way; they in fact still have some material benefits from living within the village and having social and kinship relations with middle peasants and rich farmers, and in the face of their poverty and the economic crisis this makes them vulnerable to the propaganda of casteism which tells them their problems come from the dalits who are going ahead and getting all the advantages. Thus there is a material base also for the hegemony of the rich farmers and their ability to use "caste as a weapon."

Among the rural poor toilers, the continued existence of caste divisions and the continued, if varying forms of the special oppression of dalit labourers

means that a struggle against social cultural oppression and an anti-caste struggle is a crucial part of their general battle for liberation. But this is no longer a simple anti-feudal struggle as before. For one thing the main enemies now are the rich farmers, including capitalist farmers, and the bourgeois state as such, for another, the dalits can no longer find their allies as the ex-sudra peasantry fighting against the "twice-born". Now the question has become one of uniting the dalits — and *breaking* the false, cross-class "caste unity" of the middle castes in order to bring the middle-caste toilers into alliance with dalits; it is now a question of a dalit liberation movement along with the formation of a broader militant class unity among the rural poor under the slogan of "dalit-shramik unity". So far, however, this has barely begun.

With the growth of capitalist relations particularly from the 1960s the rural poor, agricultural labourers and poor peasants, began to break loose from the former domination of the rural elite (which had earlier been partly in alliance in the areas of more militant struggle) and to assert themselves independently in a variety of forms, under agricultural labourer organizations, in dalit organizations, sometimes under "caste-influenced class forms" (as in Thanjavur where the form was that of the CPI (M) led-Kisan Sabha but the content was provided by the caste Panchayats of the Paraiyans and Pallans), sometimes with hardly any leadership at all except local contacts. Politically this class had — and still has — no party of its own on a national basis : the RPI is limited to only its dalit sections in a few areas, the CPI (ML) though based mainly on this class has also been limited to pockets and in the more feudal and backward areas and has been facing heavy repression, and the CPI and CPI (M) though leading a number of struggles have been objectively more the parties of the middle peasants and rich farmers in the countryside. In this condition the independent assertion of the rural toilers has necessitated a new kind of political appeal by the broader national parties, an appeal based on ideological (both class and caste) factors going over the heads of the rural elites — and it has been the party of the industrial bourgeoisie, the Congress-Congress(I), which has been most successful in making this appeal. After fostering the growth of the kulaks by their policies of limited land reform, credit etc., the urban bourgeoisie found it handy to check the upsurge of this class as well as to throw a few crumbs to the rural poor in terms of a tiny bit of surplus land, minimum wages, rural house-sites etc. And in the overall absence of any revolutionary party of its own, the rural poor has mostly responded to this appeal.

The capitalist farmers, in turn, began to emerge as a state-level power-holding class 10-20 years after independence. By this time, the old politics of parallel and interlinked tenant-landlord and non-Brahman-upper caste struggles were coming to an end in the more capitalistically developed areas. In these areas, in south and west India, the new kulaks came to power under a variety of political forms, including the Congress in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra and Gujarat, the DMK in Tamilnadu, even in a partial form with the Communists, in Kerala. But their discontent with the Congress policies of concession to the rural poor and their conflicts with the urban bourgeoisie over prices and credit were growing, and in the northern states where feudal tendencies were stronger and where the Congress at a state level remained controlled by upper caste

elements, these were enough to drive this class into opposition. So by 1967 most of this section in Bihar, UP, MP and later Gujarat went to the Congress (O), the Akali Dal, the BKD and BLD, and finally by 1977 and the end of Emergency into the Janata party. The southern kulak class has also tended to go into opposition (Urs Congress) but the weakness of the political opposition has driven many of them back to the Congress (I). A more recent result has been the formation of "nonparty" class organizations — the various Farmers' Associations — through which they have tried to assert their interests against the industrial bourgeoisie and re-establish their rural hegemony outside of the political parties, but also within them. At present, though many of the traditional bases of their power are crumbling, though in some areas they are still fighting their landholding "feudal" enemies and everywhere they are facing the new rising organizing efforts of rural toiler, this class is the power-holding class in the country side.

5. Regional Variations

Generally it has been the development of commercialization, proletarianization and capitalist relations of agriculture that has determined the shape of the new caste-class confrontations in the rural areas. But these developments have taken place very haltingly and, above all, unevenly. The regional variations in India have roots both in the pre-British period (hill states, border and jungly regions and peripheral areas have all had their special characteristics) and in the uneven effect of colonial rule.

A regional classification of the state can at best be only a broad and tentative effort. First, data on tenancy is partly questionable due to efforts to conceal it by both landlords and intimidated tenants; and in addition tenancy by itself can be "capitalist" as well as "feudal", depending on how much investment is made by landlords, and even more, on whether tenants themselves farm it capitalistically using hired labour and selling crops in the market. Second, while the proportion of agricultural labourers in the work force is one of the best single indicators of the degree of capitalism in relations of production, by itself this data does not really show whether the labourers are immobile and essentially tied down to one plot of land or to one big farmer, perhaps through debt bondage (in which case they are really more similar to unfree serfs), or whether they are mobile and "free" (if exploited and semi-starving) wage labourers. (Data however tend to show that concealed tenancy is not very important and that relatively few labourers are debt bonded : See Table 4).

Finally, there are important variations *within* the different states, for example between the Jharkhand region and others in Bihar; between east and west Uttar Pradesh; between the desert and plains regions of Gujarat between the coastal and inland regions of Orissa, Karnataka and Maharashtra; between the Telengana and coastal regions of Andhra. These differences are erased in the state-wise data, though there is a limited amount of regional data available to help assess their extent.

However, because state-wise variations are crucial, and because the papers in this volume deal specifically with different states, an initial effort is made here to give a regional classification. (It should also be remembered that

organization of the oppressed rural masses is taking place mainly on a state or regional basis; and the specific local peculiarities of these regions very often influence the broader, supposedly "all-India" view of different left organizations). This is not intended to be a final "definitive" classification but rather to supplement more intensive regional studies. The initial classification, given in Table 1, shows five groups of states according to both the *amount of tenancy*, and the degree to which *most of the tenanted land is taken by poor households; or middle and rich households*. (These figures are from the 1971 All India Debt and Investment Survey, which was equivalent to the 27th round of the National Sample Survey). Table 2, shows the proportion of agricultural labourer and rural labourer households, both with land and without land (from the 1974-75 Rural Labourer Enquiry) and compares these with the proportion of landless agricultural labourer and other landless households as shown in the 1971 AIDIS figures, and with the proportion of agricultural labourers in the work force as given in the 1971 Census. This shows that broadly speaking, the more "capitalist" states as defined in terms of tenancy are also the ones with the highest proportion of labourer households (though West Bengal and Bihar are somewhat exceptions). Table 3 then gives information about caste among agricultural labourers households in the different states. It also shows from the census, proportion of Scheduled Caste in the population. Finally, Table 4 shows that while "poor" states include *both* the more feudal and more capitalistic states, the capitalistic states are definitely the ones with the highest degree of *concentration* of wealth. The different categories of states are as follows :

First there is the *semi-feudal eastern peripheral group*, including Assam, Manipur, Orissa, Himachal Pradesh (and here the hill regions — and now Nagaland, Mizoram — of Assam and Manipur show less tenancy ; i.e. their essential tribal economy was less touched by British colonialism as compared with tribal regions internal to India). These show high tenancy (25-33% of households and 12-30% of land area) and most of this is "feudal" tenancy, i.e. the majority of land is taken on lease by poor households, and such tenanted land adds significantly to the holdings of poor households. These states also have only a low proportion of agricultural labourer households (though here also Assam and Orissa both show a growing and significant proportion — evidence that capitalist processes are taking place here also). Among these there is about an equal proportion of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and "others", and the landholding labourer households slightly outnumber the landless. In these states it may well be that generally the main contradiction remains between peasants as a group and landlords, since rich peasants have scarcely begun to consolidate their position as kulak farmers. One paper in this volume, deals with Orissa, and it seems that even in the most "capitalist" type of village he shows there is still significant tenancy and feudal relations.

Second, a group of states, including Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Jammu-Kashmir, might be classed as *backward semi-capitalist*. They have moderate rates of tenancy and again it is mainly more "feudal", that is the poor households take more than their share of tenanted land. Agricultural labourer households are moderate (UP and MP) or low (Jammu-Kashmir and Rajasthan) in their proportion in the population. They include

slightly more Scheduled Castes and Tribes (taken together) than caste Hindus or others, and the proportion of landed [and landless] households among such labourers is about equal. In these states, as in other states where the proportion of labourer households is relatively low, over half of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the population are not agricultural labourers — i.e. they may be poor peasants, tenants or in other occupations. This is a disparate group; one paper in this volume covers U.P.

Third, West Bengal and Bihar should probably be put in a category by themselves as *mixed semi-feudal, semi-capitalist* i.e. there is both a high degree of tenancy (held both by poor and better off households) and at the same time a large percentage of labourer households and some evidence of the growth of rural capitalism. The labourer households include again both caste Hindus and others, and both landed and landless. It seems in these states two sets of contradictions (between landlords and tenants, and between agricultural labourers and kulak farmers) are intermingling, though they have very different forms because of the different political histories of the two states. In Bihar in particular, the largely conservative political domination has meant both an extremely corrupt and caste-oriented administration, as well as a frequent very open caste-form to politics. In Bengal in contrast a strong left history has meant that the class aspect of rural organizing — especially anti-landlordism — has been brought to the fore. (It might be added here that Naxalbari is in the Himalayan region of Bengal which has one of the highest degrees of tenancy in India as a whole). Both Bengal and Bihar are discussed in articles in this volume.

Punjab and Haryana also have to be put in a separate category, as the *high tenancy-capitalist north-west*. Both states in fact have a very high degree of tenancy, but this is to a large extent capitalist tenancy in which the majority of tenanted land is held by middle peasant and rich farmer families. At the same time, both have a relatively low proportion of labourer households (especially in Haryana) but there is some evidence that this may be an underestimate since both the 1971 Census and the 1971 AIDIS survey show more landless labourer and agricultural labourers. And both states have a very unique structuring of labour relations, as can be seen in our tables. Though there is a high proportion of absolute landlessness, i.e. 46% and 57% of all rural households do not cultivate land, the agricultural labourer households are almost entirely Scheduled Caste and almost entirely landless — there are almost no landless caste Hindu agricultural labourers. It appears that landless caste Hindu (mainly Jats) either take enough land on tenancy so that they don't have to work as labourers (and for poor households tenanted land adds significantly to total holdings) — or else they lease their land to others and take other jobs, in rural auxiliary industries, as truck drivers, etc. The dalits in contrast seem less able to get land as tenants. Thus Punjab and Haryana seem to be the only two states, where the common cliché that landless = agricultural labourers = dalit holds true. One paper in this volume covers Punjab. It might be added that the massive of migrant labour from Bihar and U.P. now coming to this region who are not covered by the statistics.

Finally, Karnataka, Tamilnadu, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh might be classed as the *low tenancy capitalist southern and western states*.

Historically these were areas of mainly, but not entirely, ryotwari settlement, as well as the states where the middle-caste, peasant-based non-Brahman movements were the strongest. Within this group Karnataka and Tamilnadu, with higher rates of tenancy, are transitional. But on the whole these have relatively low tenancy, and this is mostly capitalist tenancy; the poor households have less than their share of the tenanted land (usually less than half) and rich farmers have a significant proportion. Except for Tamilnadu, the tenanted land held by the rural poor makes little difference to their overall landholdings. At the same time, there is a high proportion of agricultural labourer households. These labourer households include both landed and landless, but the landless labourer households are more in number and there is overall a high proportion of landlessness (i.e. households not cultivating land) in these states (an exception is Kerala, but this is in part a bogus statistics since most of the 'land' held by labourer households is house-site land which is not used for cultivation; cf Mencher, 1981). Those non-agricultural labourer rural households either do other rural labour, are artisans or migrate (perhaps to urban areas) in search of work. In these states, agricultural labourers include Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and caste Hindus, but the latter are more in number since the proportion of agricultural labourers has gotten so high that the middle castes have been very strongly affected by the processes of proletarianization. Even as it is, the number of Scheduled Caste agricultural labourers in these states is about equivalent to the percentage of Scheduled Castes in the population as a whole, showing that almost all of the dalits as well as a high proportion of middle castes have become proletarianized. Papers on Gujarat and Andhra show some facets of this situation — though they also show some limitations of our statistics, which do not bring out the difference between Telengana (more feudal — more existence of bondage of lower castes, less mobility of labourers etc.) and the coastal regions of Andhra.

By and large, in these capitalist states as well as in the semi-capitalist regions of Punjab, Haryana and western U.P. the main contradiction is between agricultural labourers — who are both dalits, adivasis and caste Hindus — and the kulak farmers, who are mainly caste Hindus from the middle or *kisan* castes. Strikingly it is in such states that the most sustained anti-dalit campaigns and mass riots have taken place (Kanjhawala, Marathwada, Gujarat). Here in contrast to the more semi-feudal Bihar where sections of the new kulaks also make demands for reservations and protest the caste domination of the high-caste landlords, the capitalist farmers are openly giving a call to end caste-based reservations in education and jobs and have reservations only on the basis of "economic backwardness" — a call which is nothing but a desire to turn the clock back to a time when their labourers had no educated leadership and they themselves openly dominated every aspect of village-level politics and bureaucracy. It is also striking that it is these states — and definitely not the semi-feudal ones — which are giving birth to the new "farmers' organizations" which are talking about "uniting all the peasantry" on the basis of demands for higher prices for crops and lower prices for inputs, a demand that itself shows the degree of commercialization of agriculture that has taken place. Unfortunately, the biggest left parties (CPI and CPM) have tumbled quite enthusiastically

into this trap (perhaps because their main rural cadres continue to be middle peasants and rich farmers) and are throwing their energies behind this kulak based so-called "peasants' movement" rather than behind the organizing of the rural proletariat. In the process of doing so, they have neglected in practice the task of dealing with the rural caste obstacles to organizing.

It has long been said that capitalist development in Indian agriculture exists only in enclaves and that it is ham-strung and surrounded by semi-feudal remnants and limitations. It is true that a good deal of semi-feudal relations and remnants continue to exist. But the "capitalist enclaves" are very big ones indeed, and they are growing. In many ways it is in these regions that the new themes of Indian rural politics — the rich farmers' lobbies, the organized anti-dalit mass campaigns, the caste riots — appear at their strongest. Here the caste issue cannot be understood simply in "semi-feudal" terms; rather a much more computer analysis is required. Upto now the left (including the revolutionary left) has had its strongest basis in the more backward, feudal, forest and border regions in India, and these regions have provided the framework from which they have intended to interpret all of India. Such a base and experience should not be overlooked, but it is no longer sufficient and it is necessary for the organizing of the rural poor to take up the challenge that is also thrown down in the more developed regions, where the conflict between agricultural labourers and rich farmers, with all of its caste complications, is reaching new heights.

Table 1. Tenancy

State	% Land Leased in	% Households Leasing in Land	Lowest % of Household	% of all Tenanted landhold	Highest % of Households	% of Tenanted Land Held	% of land leased to land owned by lowest group
Assam	17.04	33.15	(53.21)	66.04	(14.14)	10.30	62.33
Manipur	29.51	29.26	(51.97)	60.07	(11.93)	9.28	54.24
Orissa	12.76	24.79	(64.68)	60.07	(15.94)	18.03	28.81
Himachal Pradesh	11.88	22.81	(63.49)	65.48	—	—	23.47
West Bengal	17.81	29.63	(62.08)	62.22	(13.60)	11.04	77.04
Bihar	12.02	21.85	(50.93)	45.69	(17.38)	15.97	57.78
Haryana	21.66	21.46	(61.38)	57.72	(16.47)	13.70	117.95
Punjab	25.72	21.88	(60.73)	39.11	(21.08)	24.35	272.62
Uttar Pradesh	5.94	18.70	(61.05)	73.92	(11.20)	6.56	38.32
Madhya Pradesh	6.52	16.13	(67.71)	69.75	(14.22)	13.15	15.39
Rajasthan	6.77	14.11	(62.44)	61.87	(16.96)	18.94	12.47
Jammu & Kashmir	8.62	14.04	(65.78)	74.38	(10.25)	5.35	14.17
Karnataka	11.01	16.38	—	—	—	—	26.39
Tamil Nadu	10.79	17.27	(54.44)	43.49	(11.91)	14.83	79.95
Gujarat	3.41	12.98	(63.64)	51.38	(11.05)	16.35	8.77
Maharashtra	5.81	10.22	(67.64)	51.60	(16.73)	34.00	14.26
Andhra	6.59	10.91	(63.96)	40.17	(15.32)	32.42	19.28
Kerala	5.77	10.11	(52.58)	29.17	(13.33)	28.55	15.91
India	9.25	17.61	(51.79)	41.95	(14.95)	23.61	36.46

Note: This is calculated from the All-India Debt and Investment Survey 1971-72, *Statistical Tables Relating to Disposition of Land Held and Area and Value of Irrigated Land owned by Rural Households as on 30 June 1971*, Bombay: Reserve Bank of India, n.d. The percentages for columns 2-4 had to be calculated on a varying base because the data given is in terms of rural asset groups, not proportion of households. Thus for example the data for Assam will read that the lowest 53.21% of the households held 66.04% of the tenanted land (column 2) and this tenanted land was 62.33% of their total owned land (column 4), while the highest 14.14% of households held 10.30% of tenanted land.

Table 2. Agricultural Labourers and Landlessness

State	% of Agricultural Labourer Households			% of Rural Labourers Households	% Landless				% of Agricultural Labourer in Work Force
	With land	Without land	Total		Agricultural Labourer	Artisan	Others	Total	
Assam	7.27	5.94	13.06	22.05	6.7	0.8	11.2	8.4	9.6
Manipur	.66	.66	1.32	1.97	—	—	—	—	3.6
Orissa	13.26	7.92	21.18	25.72	12.1	1.7	9.0	22.8	28.3
Himachal Pradesh	1.42	.36	1.78	—	—	—	—	—	4.2
West Bengal	20.13	23.85	43.96	55.12	17.4	1.9	14.9	34.2	26.5
Bihar	19.31	13.92	33.29	36.41	13.4	1.0	5.2	19.6	38.9
Haryana	1.53	7.58	9.11	16.18	14.7	4.3	20.7	40.0	16.2
Punjab	1.76	19.12	20.88	25.55	25.8	5.1	26.2	57.1	20.1
Uttar Pradesh	8.98	6.83	15.81	19.06	8.1	3.6	14.1	22.2	20.1
Madhya Pradesh	11.49	10.28	21.77	24.00	10.3	1.4	6.3	18.0	26.6
Rajasthan	1.84	2.12	3.96	6.45	3.3	1.5	8.4	13.2	9.3
Jammu & Kashmir	1.07	.61	1.68	4.85	0.7	0.5	4.9	6.1	3.1
Karnataka	14.38	16.40	30.78	35.77	—	—	—	—	26.7
Tamilnadu	13.78	24.27	38.05	44.29	26.6	3.8	14.2	44.6	30.5
Gujarat	7.70	14.60	22.30	29.58	18.3	3.6	14.1	36.6	22.5
Maharashtra	15.04	16.93	31.97	36.66	19.8	2.9	8.7	31.4	29.3
Andhra	14.00	21.78	35.78	39.42	23.1	3.3	12.0	38.4	37.5
Kerala	23.75	3.65	27.40	42.14	3.8	0.6	5.1	10.3	30.7
India	12.44	12.84	25.28	30.27	14.6	2.4	10.6	27.6	

Note: Columns 1 and 2 are taken from the Rural Labour Enquiry, 1974-75, *Final Report on Indebtedness Among Rural Households*, Chandigarh: Government of India, Ministry of Labour, Table 2.1. "Agricultural labour households" are defined as those getting the majority of their income from agricultural wage labour, and 'rural labour households' as those getting the majority of their income from agricultural or other menial wage labour. Households "with land" or defined as households cultivating land, either owned or on lease. Column 3 is taken from the All-India Rural Debt and Investment Survey, 1971-72. Here 'landless' households refer to those with less than .005 acres of cultivated (owned or leased) land; thus the "agricultural labourer" category here is broadly equivalent to the agricultural labourer household without land as defined by the Rural Labour Enquiry. Column 4 is taken from the 1971 Census of India.

Table 3. Caste, Agricultural Labourers and Landlessness

<i>State</i>	<i>Agricultural Labourer Households (%)</i>			<i>Scheduled Caste</i>		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>With Land</i>	<i>Without Land</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>With Land</i>	<i>Without Land</i>
Assam	13.06	(7.27)	(5.79)	4.64	(2.87)	(1.76)
Manipur	1.32	(.66)	(.66)	—	—	—
Orissa	21.18	(13.26)	(7.92)	5.86	(3.01)	(2.86)
Himachal Pradesh	1.78	(1.42)	(.36)	1.42	(1.07)	(0.35)
West Bengal	43.96	(20.13)	(23.86)	17.98	(7.60)	(10.42)
Bihar	32.29	(19.37)	(13.92)	14.01	(7.20)	(6.84)
Haryana	9.11	(1.53)	(7.58)	7.22	(1.24)	(5.98)
Punjab	20.88	(1.76)	(19.12)	18.14	(1.26)	(16.87)
Uttar Pradesh	15.81	(8.98)	(6.83)	9.72	(6.84)	(5.28)
Madhya Pradesh	21.77	(11.49)	(10.28)	5.99	(2.88)	(3.11)
Rajasthan	3.96	(1.84)	(2.12)	2.37	(1.06)	(0.31)
Jammu & Kashmir	1.68	(1.07)	(.61)	0.46	(0.31)	(0.15)
Karnataka	30.78	(14.38)	(16.40)	8.67	(3.88)	(4.79)
Tamilnadu	38.05	(13.78)	(24.27)	16.47	(5.12)	(11.35)
Gujarat	22.30	(7.70)	(14.60)	4.91	(1.50)	(3.41)
Maharashtra	31.97	(15.04)	(16.93)	7.38	(3.49)	(3.89)
Andhra	35.78	(14.00)	(21.78)	12.73	(4.45)	(8.28)
Kerala	27.40	(23.75)	(3.65)	7.45	(6.19)	(1.26)
India	25.28	(12.44)	(12.84)	9.84	(4.43)	(5.41)

Note : This table is taken from Rural Labour Enquiry, 1974-75.

<i>Scheduled Tribes</i>			<i>Others Total</i>	<i>% of Scheduled Castes in Population</i>	<i>% of Scheduled Tribes in Population</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>With Land</i>	<i>Without Land</i>			
1.25	(0.45)	(0.60)	7.17	6.1	12.8
—	—	—	—	—	—
5.55	(3.82)	(1.72)	9.77	15.1	23.1
—	—	—	.36	—	—
5.32	(2.55)	(2.81)	20.66	19.1	5.7
1.74	(1.42)	(1.32)	16.54	14.1	8.8
—	—	—	1.89	18.9	—
—	—	—	2.74	24.7	—
.24	(.07)	(.17)	5.85	21.0	0.2
7.39	(3.98)	(3.41)	8.39	13.1	20.9
.60	(.33)	(.27)	.99	15.8	12.3
—	—	—	.22	8.2	—
.46	(.33)	(.13)	21.24	13.1	0.8
.47	(.13)	(.33)	21.11	17.8	0.8
6.79	(2.20)	(4.54)	10.60	6.8	14.0
5.46	(1.78)	(3.67)	19.13	6.0	5.9
1.58	(.46)	(1.12)	21.47	13.3	3.8
.89	(.63)	(.26)	19.06	8.3	1.3
2.51	(1.25)	(1.25)	1293	14.6	6.9

Table 2.1.

Table 4. Some Aspects of the Rural Households

States	Average Assets (Rs.) Per Rural Household	Concentration Ratio	% Indebted Agric. Labourer Households	% of Indebted Households Indebted to Employer	Change from 1964-65 to 1974-75		
					% increase in Agric. Labourer Households	% Increase in Rural Labourer Households	% Increase in Rural House- holds
Assam	7,833	0.5560	31.1	5.65	203.22	73.72	14.53
Manipur	—	—	22.2	1.70	—	—	39.45
Orissa	6,023	0.5976	64.2	3.32	45.06	53.54	—
Himachal Pradesh	22,673	0.4967	54.2	—	—	—	—
West Bengal	7,331	0.6600	56.3	15.05	49.14	39.39	—
Bihar	12,828	0.6715	70.8	12.32	266.79	33.13	15.68
Haryana	27,139	0.6291	63.4	14.62	} 53.03	48.07	20.13
Punjab	31,833	0.6831	72.8	29.48			
Uttar Pradesh	13,531	0.5922	73.7	10.17	34.55	41.10	18.16
Madhya Pradesh	10,520	0.5890	65.4	20.07	9.23	9.36	1.93
Rajasthan	12,754	0.5588	81.0	13.88	—19.49	—5.53	11.18
Jammu & Kashmir	15,260	0.4390	57.2	—	—	—	—
Karnataka	10,032	0.6547	71.5	6.93	—	—	—
Tamilnadu	6,827	0.7113	82.6	11.88	38.27	47.57	1.79
Gujarat	12,874	0.6342	58.3	20.28	52.72	89.24	14.23
Maharashtra	11,682	0.6488	60.1	4.67	25.84	31.84	22.34
Andhra	8,080	0.7030	81.0	5.62	37.60	38.89	20.82
Kerala	11,615	0.6608	84.9	5.91	27.12	31.03	30.67
India	11,311	0.6551	65.4	10.2	35.60	38.89	20.82

Note : Column 2 of the table is taken from the Rural Labour Enquiry, 1974-75, Table 6.1 (6), 2 and Table 3.1 (6). By and large it shows little correlation with degree of "semi feudal" or capitalist development. Column 3 is calculated from it Rural Labour Enquiry, 1974-75, Table 2.1 and shows a tendency to a negative correlation, i.e. the more "semi feudal" areas have shown the greatest growth of labour households. Column 1 is taken from All-India Debt and Investment Survey (1971-72) Assets of Rural Households as on July 30, 1971 (Bombay, Reserve Bank of India 1976) Tables 2.5 and 2.7.

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1. For discussion of the "Aryan Theory" see Omvedt, 1976. As Klass has noted, recent anthropological theories ignore the issue of origins but more or less give implicit backing to the "Aryan theory", partly because of their idealism. Such theories, by scholars such as Louis Dumont, McKim Marriott, Ronald Inden and others, argue that Indian society has to be understood as "Indians" see it, meaning by this according to its high-caste self-conception. They define the caste system as constituted by rules of "purity and pollution" or systems of belief about "code and substance", and these beliefs are in turn identified with orthodox Hindu conceptions having their roots of Sanskritic and Vedic literature — and thus in the period of the Indo-European conquest and the society arising out of it.
2. In arguing that the Indian social formation was primarily characterized first by the dominance of a tributary mode (Asiatic Mode) and then by the formation of an essentially feudal mode from about 600 A.D. in the north and some centuries later in the south, I am following the main lines of argument of such scholars as Kosambi, R.S. Sharma and Garjezi. Gough (1980) argues that Tamilnadu was dominated by a tributary/Asiatic Mode for almost the entire pre-British period, but she herself sees feudal tendencies (which she describes as "communal feudalism") coming into being towards the end of the Chola period and becoming more important hereafter. I would prefer to say that feudalism became dominant by the end of that period.

Both the tributary and feudal mode were of course shaped by caste in India. In the tributary form the main relations of exploitation were between state officials (including temple managers and bureaucrats) and a majority land-holding peasantry; in the case of both the Mauryan state in the north and the Chola state in the south this peasantry mainly held the land collectively or re-distributed it very frequently. But at the same time this peasantry dominated minority castes of artisans and semi-slave dalit labourers.

Feudalizing of tendencies had two forms, which Kosambi calls "feudalism from above" and "feudalism from below". In the former, a landholding feudal class got control either by conquest or land-grants and assigned rights from the state which were then appropriated on a hereditary basis and converted into actual control over the land and the people on it. In "feudalism from below" sections, often a headman lineage, emerged from the dominant peasantry, or the peasant clan itself gradually became non-cultivating landlords as dependent "guest cultivators" and other tenants moved on to the land. In both cases a minority non-cultivating landlord class emerged (often still a lineage holding the land collectively) who maintained the "managerial" control over artisans and dalits which was earlier held by peasant cultivators, but who now controlled sub-ordinate tenant cultivators as well.

Variations in this process throughout India, and the survivals in some regions of a majority peasant community with collective traditions produced the different pre-British "ryotwari" and "zamindari" areas described by Stokes (1978)—end of course earlier by Maine and others.

In this, I agree with the distinction made by Kate Currie but not her assessment of the empirical India data. Currie writes "In summary then: The FP Mentai's the extraction of the agricultural surplus — in the form of labour or rent — directly from peasant producers by landlords exercising political authority in the absence of a state apparatus. The axis of exploitation is structured between individual feudal lords and individual serfs, and in this sense, the relationship is both direct and personal. By contrast, under the TMP, in the absence of landlords exercising personal control over the direct producers, the agricultural surplus — in the form of labour or tax — is impersonally extracted from peasant producers by state officials. In this instance, the axis of exploitation is between an impersonal state and the peasant community" (Currie, 1980: 13-14). The qualifications here I would make are first, that feudalism does not necessarily mean landlords act in the *absence* of the state, rather as its lowest, if independent, rung. There are clearly states in feudal societies. Second, of course the nature

of the way caste shaped the FMP in India was partly to collectivize relations between the feudal classes and the toiling classes — hence Gough's use of the term "communal feudalism." There were also of course individualizing tendencies, though it was only colonial rule that individualized (and in many ways decisively transformed) Indian feudalism.

3. The implication of our position (and of the general Althusserian formulation of the relationship between the economic structure and other levels within different modes of production) is that whereas it is appropriate to speak of a single *capitalist* mode of production, variations in precapitalist modes will be much greater and there are likely to be many types of feudal or other pre-capitalist modes resulting from the varying political and cultural characteristics that shape them.
4. Gough (1979) classifies pre-British south Indian society into five major classes; the 'state class' (rulers, administration and landlords, and here she includes Veilalas though other works of hers count them among cultivating peasants in the Asiatic mode); the 'state servants'; "commodity producers and merchants"; "peasants, herders, fisherman and attached village servants" (i.e. peasant and artisan castes); and "agricultural and menial slaves" (dalit labourers), the last two being exploited producing classes. These she sees as essentially equivalent to the four varnas and untouchables in north India. While I would agree that there are essentially three exploiting classes/sections equivalent to the "twice-born" varna (though not always classed as twice-born), I think the division between the peasants and the "village servants" who were mainly lower-ranked and subordinate, was also an important class division among the exploited.

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Class, Caste and Power in Rural Orissa

JAGANATH PATHY

The literature on rural power structure in India is heavily weighted in favour of caste as the most important unit of analysis. It is argued that caste is the context within which the subsequent observations on economics, politics and rituals acquire their meaning. Discussions around dominant and dependent castes in the villages have occupied several sociologists during the 1960s, and still maintain a prominent place in the sociological deliberations. As a consequence, barring a few attempts, the question of class remains grossly neglected. This paper contends that undue emphasis and unusual degree of autonomy given to caste in rural studies has led to a number of biases and distortions in the understanding of the power structure; and to that effect, the paper gravitates towards tracing the broad relationships between class and caste and their independent and interrelated influence on the rural power structure in Orissa.

The study includes a predominantly tribal village, a village characterised primarily by feudal relationships, and a village manifestly showing signs of capitalistic development in agriculture. However, these villages are tribal, feudal and capitalist in the predominant sense and not in the pure sense. The empirical investigation into these three types of villages are carried out, precisely because of the assumption that the variations in the level of development of forces of production may have direct bearing on the power structure and political consciousness of the villages. This would facilitate the comparison of the results in different socio-economic settings.

Besides the above mentioned theoretical and methodological relevance for the selection of the units, it has an in-built rationale at the substantive level in the macro-context of Orissa. Of all the states of the Indian Union, the State of Orissa contains the highest percentage of population (23.11) under the category of Scheduled Tribes. The extent of the Scheduled Area covers as much as one-third of the territory of the state. And depending upon the above two attributes 34 Assembly seats have been reserved for the Scheduled Tribes in the House of 147 (23.13%). Together, they provide a special significance in the selection of a tribal village belonging to a tribal constituency. Following from this a village,

Pokalingia by name, was selected from G. Udaigiri constituency of Phulbani district (hereafter V-P).

The second village is selected from an ex-zamindari area. Mention may be made that at the time of Independence, as much as 81 per cent of the privately owned land was under zamindari system. Besides, various surveys repeatedly underlined that Orissa remains an area of backwardness and deprivation, containing more than 70 per cent of the rural population below the poverty line in 1972-73. Only 16 per cent of the area of the State is irrigated as against 75 per cent in Punjab and 25 per cent in the country as a whole. Similarly compared to the 95 Kgs. of fertiliser consumed per hectare in Punjab only 9 kgs are applied per hectare in Orissa. As a result, in spite of substantial increase in area, the total agricultural output has actually recorded a decline in 10 districts out of the 13, "because of a big fall in productivity." In foodgrains, the productivity has rapidly declined from 935 Kgs per hectare to 847 Kgs during 1962-65 and 1970-73, when states like Punjab have increased from 1095 Kgs to 1959 Kgs (Bhalla and Alagh, 1979: 42-54, 57). This denotes continued reliance on the existing low productivity techniques and misuse of land resources, a feature common to pre-capitalist agriculture. In addition, the highly skewed landownership — 3 per cent controlling 25 per cent of land while 60 per cent own as little as 10 per cent of the land — widespread tenancy (32%), staggering underemployment of labour force (26%), negligible expansion of industrial employment, debtor-creditor nexus—90% of the rural credit from moneylenders—, speculative trade, and conspicuous wastage of surplus by the landed gentry denote the domination of unproductive feudal agriculture in Orissan economy. Thus the selection of the second village is justified. The village by name, Talapatna (hereafter V-T), of Dharakote Panchayat in Ganjam district, is marked by the natural concentration of land in a few hands and distribution of uneconomical parcels of land among a small section of agricultural population.

The third village, Mukundapur by name (hereafter V-M), is selected from the ex-ryotwari area near a small industrial township. It may be recalled that ryotwari system was initially characterised by peasant proprietorship and was enforced in a small part of Orissa. But since it has been widely presumed that this system was more progressive than the other tenures, it may be useful to compare the present situation with that of non-ryotwari regions. Moreover, as the V-M is situated near the industrial township of Aska, it may be possible to locate the influence of industry on agrarian relations. Considering the limits of industrial growth, irrigation and cash crop cultivation in Orissa, this village may not be the representative of Orissan agriculture. Nonetheless, it may have some similarities with a section of villages in the coastal belt of Orissa and may contribute to the understanding of the penetration of capitalistic mode of production in agriculture in the state.

This is not to imply that the three villages are representative of their respective universes, or of the total universe. This would require a scale of research clearly beyond the scope of the present enterprise. Yet the assumption behind the selection of these villages is that they are expected to reveal some of the realities of their respective universes, and therefore, should prove rewarding as a preliminary study, particularly when, unlike many other states, Orissa is not

endowed with macro-level information on caste, class and power distribution, let alone their intersections. Still however, the paper acknowledges two major weaknesses in the selection of the villages, namely, (i) enough consideration is neither given to the spatial distribution of the villages nor with the variations between the villages belonging to the selected area; and (ii) although there were 24 feudatory states before Independence, none of the villages belong to that region. Of course, any empirical research cannot but bear with such or other weaknesses.

V-P has 284 persons distributed in 68 households. The Kandha belonging to Scheduled Tribe category constitute a total of 210 persons in 50 households. The rest comprise the non-tribal households. Excluding the Kamar and the Pana, the other castes were settled only in the last 25 to 40 years, by single households and not as caste groups. In contrast to gradual growth of this village, the V-T came into existence some 80 years ago, founded by the Zamindar of Dharakote. The settlers worked as tenants and artisans of the zamindar. After zamindari abolition, several artisans and upper caste households who had no land or very meagre land left the village during the mid-1950s. Today, it has 320 persons in 72 households; out of which the Khadal—a lower caste—alone constitute three-fourth of the total strength. In V-M, the alia, a backward caste numerically dominates the population. They are distributed in 87 households with a population of 390. The Brahmin, Gauda, Keota, Dhoba, Bauri, Dandasi and Muslim constitute the rest 224 persons in 58 households. (Table-1). Each village manifests a disproportionately higher numerical position of one category over other categories.

Although a broad stratification on the basis of caste hierarchy is evident in all the villages, some difficulties arise in arriving at an acceptable classification in the hierarchical order. For instance, in V-P, both the Sundi and the Kamar claim superiority over each other, so do the Bauri over Dandasi in V-M. And among the artisan castes, the dispute is sharpest. Decades back, it has been rightly observed that “the order of social precedence among the individual castes cannot be made definite because not only is there no ungrudging acceptance of such rank but also the ideas of the people on this point are very nebulous and uncertain” (Ghurye, 1951 : 7). Besides, there is the clear problem in regard to the non-Hindu communities. The Kandha claims superiority over the Gauda, while the latter argues the same. Neither accept cooked food from the other, whereas both accept water from each other's hands. Likewise is the case of the Muslim who while claiming superiority over the Keota drink from his hands; but the Keota does not accept even water from the Muslim. Hence the hierarchy used in the Table-1 does not necessarily reflect the actual caste hierarchy.

It may be argued here that the village within its boundaries may not be sufficient for an understanding of the actual and the potential strength of the castes. Among the other relations of caste, land, labour, loan, business, faction etc., the affinal ties beyond the village may be regarded as an additional strength to individuals and groups in a village. However, for our limited purpose, the affinal strength beyond the village limit cannot be convincingly added to the actual strength of the castes in the villages, in isolation from time, space and other relations. A mere counting of affinal strength may not be of much

significance in the economy and politics of the castes in the villages. Moreover, since people, belonging to all castes, prefer marriage ties outside their own village and usually the same villages reciprocate the marriage alliances, the potential affinal strength derived from the nearby villages do not alter the existing difference of actual numerical strength of different castes in the three concerned villages.

Before describing the class structure, it is desirable to describe the type and quality of land and its distribution in the three villages. In V-P, there is both communal and private ownership of land. The former, however, is too little, standing at an average of 0.5 acres of shifting land, annually distributed among the tribal households. For our purpose, we exclude the little communal land (29 acres) and consider only lands in individual possession. The distribution of private land is unequal. Only 7.3 per cent of the village land (out of 118 acres) is distributed among two-third of the households. The Muthahead—an ex-administrative head of several villages—owns 20 acres of land outside the village, whereas four non-tribals from the nearby town together own 18 acres of V-P land.

The total cultivated area in V-T is 148 acres. In 1974, the village had an average of 2 acres of cultivated land per household. But ownership is highly concentrated. Only 17 families (23.6 %) have their own land, totalling 56 acres. The remaining 92 acres are distributed between the Zamindar (63 acres), his ex-manager (Diwan) residing 25 miles away (25 acres), and a small merchant of a nearby village (4 acres). The Zamindar had about 735 acres of land in 18 villages, out of which, to avoid the land legislations, he transferred 3.0 acres to a temple, which he had constructed in 1966.² The Diwan has 40 acres of land, including the land in V-T. Excluding the land owned by the three outside landowners in other villages, it is noticed that only 7.4 per cent of the village land is left for 90.6 per cent of the households. (Table 2). At the same time, almost half of the unsurveyed land of the village remains waste under the categories of pasture, mango groves, cremation ground etc. Excluding 10 acres, belonging to the Zamindar, the rest of the village land depends on the monsoon for cultivation. More than 90 per cent of the land is used for paddy cultivation, but the yield per acre is very small ranging between 300 to 400 kgs, after deductions made for the seed.³

In V-M, about 85 per cent of the working population depend on agriculture. The village has a total 155 acres of land; out of which more than 10 acres belong to three outside landowners while only 2 persons of this village have 2 acres of land in other villages. As many as 28.4 per cent of the households are landless and another 45.9 per cent of the households have up to one acre holding; whereas only 6 per cent of the households have 40.5 per cent of the total land. This means, in spite of one-fourth of the land being irrigated, sugarcane cultivation taking up supplementary income from industry during the sugarcane crushing season available, still nearly half of the households possess uneconomic holdings (up to 1 acre). In the last five years, only 7 households have sold 4.5 acres of land to four persons. Such a persistence of small holdings has naturally retarded the development of the forces of production (Marx, 1970: 787).

Coming to the class composition of the villages; the classes are defined by the relations in which the various sections stand to the means of production, by the manner in which the surplus is expropriated from the actual toilers, and by the way the expropriators spend it on. The various peasant classes are also identified according to the well-established definitions (Mao, 1965: 13-21, 23-59, 137-143).

Landlords

There are five landlords in V-P. To one outside landlord belonging to the Kanda community, a tenant of this village is attached and two families are indebted to him. The other four landlords are small merchants of neighbouring township. They belong to different castes and cultivate their land in V-P by the help of six sharecroppers. Three of the sharecroppers are indebted to their own landlords.

In contrast, V-T has three landlords who, control 62.2 per cent of the total village land. The zamindar alone employs 17 sharecroppers to cultivate his 63 acres of land in this village. The rent is 60 per cent of the gross produce for paddy and 50 per cent for pulses. In addition, the tenants have several unpaid labour obligations considerably reducing the productivity of labour (Pathy, 1975: 893-900). In 1959, the second brother of the family became the Sarpanch, having been unanimously elected. In the 1962, he was chairman of the Dharakote Panchayat Samittee. In the 1967 and 1971 Assembly elections, he was elected from the Swatantra Party and was twice deputy minister. However, in 1974 elections, he was defeated by a Congress candidate. The other two landlords belonging to upper and backward castes have largely similar relations with their tenants, but do not have much importance in the V-T politics.

In V-M, there are 12 landlords related to the agrarian structure, out of whom 7 are outsiders (Table-3). The common pattern of rent is 1:1 share for dry land and 2:3 for irrigated land. For sugar cane, the share is 1:3 without seed or manure, and 1:1 with all the necessary inputs. The inside landlords belong to the Brahmin and Alia castes, owning land between 5 to 15 acres. The most powerful landlord frequently evicts the tenants and participates in usurious moneylending.⁴ He is also a building contractor, and hires out his pump-set and two iron ploughs to the peasants. He is simultaneously rentier, usurer and trader of the main cash crop. The second landlord has 5 tenants, many are indebted to him. Like the first one, he also gets subsidised inputs and also is a dealer of fertilisers. He too controls a faction, which has the major share of land in the village. The other two landlords live likewise in a low order of priority in village politics.

In short, none of the outside landlords has considerable control over the people and politics of the village. In V-T, the Zamindar has enormous political power both at the local and regional level largely due to his control over land and by sanction of tradition; whereas in V-M, the two faction leaders belonging to the numerically predominant caste wield decisive power only within the village.

Rich Peasants

There are four rich peasants in V-P, holding between 8 and 12 acres. They belong to the tribal and backward caste categories. In case of the tribals, landownership and tradition reinforce each other to give leadership in the two factions of the village. The other two rich peasants are not involved in the village politics. Two important points emerge from this: First, the myth of tribal homogeneity does not hold true; there is a sharp development of internal differentiation within the community in relation to economy and politics. Secondly, the notion that the non-tribals as a whole are the only exploiting groups of people is untenable.

In V-T there are two rich peasants. One (Kshatriya) cultivates his 30 acres of land by the help of farm servants as well as tenants. He leads the second biggest faction of the village and is allied to the congress. The other one (Odiya) cultivates his 8 acres of land by wage labour and tenants. The tenants have fewer obligations to him.

In case of V-M, there are five rich peasants belonging to upper and backward castes. Fifteen households are indebted to them. One of them is a ward member and another caste-headman. Their dominance on the whole is very little in comparison to the landlords.

To sum up, in the tribal village, political power is controlled by the rival rich peasants belonging to the same community; in the ex-zamindari village, it is between the main landlord and main rich peasant; and in the ex-ryotwari village between two inside landlords.

Middle Peasants

There are 10 tribal and 4 non-tribal households in V-P, who may be considered as middle peasants. For most of them, the harvest is just sufficient for family sustenance. Those who have little surplus have smaller households. Two tribals of this class are strong supporters of the Muthahead faction. There is the pana caste headman of the village in this category; who is also considered important on village matters at large.

In V-T, only five belong to this class. The richest among them, belonging to the Scheduled Caste is an active member of the CPI (Marxist) and organised four local movements concerning the interests of the tenants and labourers. All other middle peasants supplement their income by leasing-in land; and all of them are relatively conscious politically.

In V-M, there are 14 middle peasants distributed among five castes of the village. Two of them are Panchayat ward members. One of them is a peasant activist, who normally works a lot in mobilizing the people against the landed interests.

From this, it appears that the power of middle peasants rest largely in their organizing capacity on class lines, away from factional disputes; and that this class is more capable of carrying the interests of the masses, due to their independent living.

Small Peasants

So far as the small peasants are concerned, there are 22 tribal and 5 non-tribal households in V-P. Five of them supplement their income by sharecropping; fourteen have forest, farm and road labour as secondary occupation; and sixteen of them are indebted. As a whole, they play a minor role in village politics. In V-T, there are 10 households with small holdings, eight of whom are also tenants. Their role in the village politics is diverse, and is of some significance only with relation to the three leaders. In V-M more than half of the households are small peasants, a historical product of the ryotwari land system. Twenty seven of them are tenants and 35 are indebted. Roughly, they are divided in between the two major factions of the village.

Labourers

The normal wage rate for male and female worker is Rs. 2.50 and 1.75, respectively, for roughly 10 hours of work per day. The wage rate shows considerable variations between villages and also between seasons. Eighteen agricultural labourers of V-T are indebted. The rate of interest is roughly 60 per cent till the next harvest. Most of loans are used for food and ceremonies, while only a little is used for productive purposes (11.2%). In V-M, there are 21 agricultural and 11 industrial workers, out of whom 21 are indebted. They are more conscious and have participated in a number of demonstrations organised by the CPI.

Business and Others

The few petty businessmen are quite weak. In all cases, there is the predominance of exchange market with the domination of the landed classes.

To recapitulate the brief description, it may be mentioned that though the classical feudal relations of the western variety are not noticed even in V-T, none of the villages have shown definite signs of capitalist development. In V-M, although chances of capitalising agriculture is bright, the landlords' and the rich peasants' involvement in renting, usury, speculative trade, including control of inputs stand critically in the way.

Secondly, since same class position is occupied by members of all castes, the caste status is not congruent with class status; although lower castes are naturally more located among the categories of small peasants, sharecroppers and labourers, and the higher caste groups are more concentrated in the landlord and rich peasant categories. Hence, the categories of caste and class are only broadly intertwined and appear mutually to buttress each other. It has been correctly observed: "Every caste, sub-caste and religious community contributed its own share (some more and some less) both to the bourgeois-landlord as well as to the proletarian, semi-proletarian peasant classes. Class society was thus emerging within the very framework of an essentially caste society". Namboodirapad, 1977: 18). But in the pre-capitalist context of Orissa, it is often difficult to dissimilate infra and superstructure precisely as the economic classes do not come to full ideological and political articulation (Godelier, 1977: 123). At present, the feudal interests use caste idiom for mobilising the various classes for their own sectional ends. Thus caste consciousness and practices continue because class

practices have not yet become dominant at political level. The economically constituted class (class in itself) does not lead automatically to the self conscious class (class for itself). Marx, therefore, repeatedly stressed that "the separate individuals form a class only in so far as they have to carry on a common battle against another class; otherwise they are on hostile terms with each other as competitors" (1964: 132). Besides the primordial relations, and caste and ethnic divisions, this has kept the everyday struggles of the people spontaneous, sporadic and isolated, and thus get repeatedly liquidated; everytime increasingly reinforcing the feudal and semi-feudal domination. Nevertheless, it may be strongly noted that the caste as a ritual ranking category does not necessarily correspond with economic and political status; and thus looking agrarian structure in terms of caste is misleading, and obfuscates the objective reality.

Thirdly, the leadership of *status quo* manipulation rests largely in the hands of the semi-feudal landlords, and occasionally at the hands of the rich peasants if they control relatively more land and have contacts with powerful state and national political parties, or endowed with traditional sanctions. The reverse type of leadership predominantly comes from among the middle peasants followed by industrial labour, small peasant, and agricultural labourer in that order. The Panchayat leadership, ward members in particular, largely belong to the former category at a subservient level to the factional leaders, whereas depending upon the context, the working class representatives also enter into the arena in a small way. The caste leadership also rests with relatively affluent individuals of the concentrated caste with usual support of age and family background. The upper castes and other communities have no caste councils.

Lastly, in V-P, there are two major factions, each dominated by a Kandha, owning the maximum amount of land. The other castes are more or less equally divided between the two factions, implicitly. Thus in the absence of cohesive and unified leadership, the Kandha cannot be called as the dominant community. In V-T, there are three big leaders and two major factions. Each faction is led by a Kshatriya (one inside and another outside the village). Chiefly their power rests on their land, through which they manipulate their strength by dividing the numerically stronger Khadal. The third leader is from the Khadal caste, who often attempts to neutralise the factional conflicts. Thus the numerically insignificant upper caste has the economic and political power, but as it is divided, the village is divided. In V-M, the Adlia caste appears dominated, but it is internally divided according to the interest of the dominant individuals of the caste and is facilitated by the differences in the outside political personalities. There are of course several independent peasants and industrial labourers, who do not figure under their dominance. The three Panchayat members belong to two different castes, and two of the members are supporters of the CPI. Out of the three caste councils, only the lowest in ritual hierarchy is somewhat active. Interestingly, the comparative analysis of the faction leaders and the importance of factions in the three different villages reveal that with the development in the forces of production, there is a progressive decline in the role of factions and an increasing role of classes. Factionalism will continue as long as the toiling masses remain unorganised along class lines.

Table 1
Distribution of Households and Population in the Villages

<i>Caste/Community</i>	<i>V-P</i>	<i>V-T</i>	<i>U-M</i>
I. Upper Castes			
Brahmin	—	—	5 (19)
Kshatriya	—	2 (13)	—
II. Backward Castes			
Tanti	—	3 (10)	—
Gauda	3 (11)	5 (22)	15 (77)
Gudia	—	1 (5)	—
Teli	1 (5)	—	—
Adlia/odiya	—	5 (25)	87 (390)
Kamar	1 (4)	—	—
Sundi	1 (3)	—	—
Keota	—	1 (2)	7 (22)
III. Scheduled Castes			
Dhoba	—	3 (12)	17 (58)
Pana	11 (45)	—	—
Khadal	—	52 (231)	—
Bauri	—	—	4 (13)
Hadi	1 (6)	—	—
Dandasi	—	—	9 (29)
IV. Other Communities			
Muslim	—	—	1 (16)
Kandha	50 (210)	—	—
Total	68 (284)	72 (320)	145 (614)

Table 2
Percentage of Distribution of Land in the Three Villages

<i>Land Category</i> (in acres)	<i>V-P</i>		<i>V-T</i>		<i>V-M</i>	
	<i>House holds</i>	<i>Land</i>	<i>House holds</i>	<i>Land</i>	<i>House holds</i>	<i>Land</i>
Landless	31.9	—	73.3	—	28.4	—
Upto $\frac{1}{2}$	31.9	5.6	5.3	1.0	25.6	9.7
$\frac{1}{2}$ —1	2.8	1.7	8.0	3.0	20.3	14.5
1—2	—	—	2.7	1.7	12.81	9.4
2—3	13.9	21.9	1.3	1.7	6.9	15.9
3—5	12.5	32.7	4.0	7.4	2.7	10.9
5—10	4.2	18.6	1.3	5.4	2.0	11.6
10—20	2.8	19.5	—	—	1.3	18.0
20—30	—	—	2.7	37.2	—	—
above 30	—	—	1.3	42.6	—	—
Total :	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
	(N=72)	(N=118)	(N=75)	(N=148)	(N=148)	(N=155)

Note : In V-P four outside landowners and in V-T and V-M three outside landowners each, are included.

Table 2a
Class Distribution in the three Villages

<i>Class</i>	<i>V-P</i>		<i>V-T</i>		<i>V-M</i>	
	<i>House holds</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>House holds</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>House holds</i>	<i>%</i>
Landlord	5	6.8	3	4.0	12	7.9
Rich Peasant	4	5.5	2	2.7	5	3.3
Middle Peasant	14	19.2	5	6.7	14	9.2
Poor Peasant	27	37.0	10	13.3	79	52.0
Pure Sharecropper	—	—	22	29.3	—	—
Farm, Forest, Mine Labourer	14	19.2	28	37.3	21	13.8
Industrial Labourer	—	—	—	—	11	7.2
Business	5	6.8	2	2.7	3	2.0
Others	4	5.5	3	4.0	7	4.6
Total	73	100.00	75	100.00	152	100.00

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1. In Orissa, for preventing transfer of land of tribals to non-tribals, "The Orissa Scheduled Areas Transfer of Immovable Property Regulations" was passed in 1956, but was enforced only in 1959. Hence, the moneylenders, merchants and other non-tribals have utilised the interim period for their own advantage (Govt. of India, 1960-61: 416).
2. Mention may be made that not only the ceiling laws had a very leisurely journey through the state legislature, giving ample time to the landlords to take all steps to nullify their effects as and when they could be imposed but also the first legislation — the Land Reform Act, 1960 — was introduced by a government in coalition with the Swatantra party, which is supposed to be a reactionary feudal party. Of course, the subsequent ministries upto 1973 have amended the Act thrice before legally enforcing it, still now after giving numerous exemptions on orchards, land held by religious and educational institutions etc., the government has only estimated less than one per cent of cultivable area (1.71 lakh acres) as surplus and is yet to acquire that for redistribution. Meanwhile, the landlords have easily circumvented, the ceiling laws by mala fide transfers to relatives, constructing temples and so on. The ambivalent policy bespeaks the anxiety of the state to preserve the parasitic semi-feudal classes.
3. In fact, in the state, while the paddy crop covers three fourth of the total cropped area, its average yield stands at 9.6 quintals per hectare, the lowest among the major rice growing states of India (Patnaik, 1975: 202).
4. Although there are a number of tenancy legislations in Orissa namely, the Orissa Tenants Protection Act, 1948, the Tenant Relief Act, 1955; the Land Reform Act, 1960 and its subsequent amendments in 1965, 1972, 1974 — hardly they seem to have influenced the tenancy in the three villages. Sharecropping is widespread, evictions frequent, rent is as high as four times of the legally fixed one-eighth of the gross virtually produce and various forms of servitude is not uncommon. Thus the tenancy laws are made infructuous.

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Caste, Land and Power in Uttar Pradesh : 1775-1970

RAJENDRA SINGH

This article aims, first of all, at presenting a sociologically reconstructed account of agrarian social structure in an evolutionary-historical perspective. Various caste groups, their relative positions in relations to the ownership and possession of land, and the distribution of power (which is generally determined by the inter-action between caste and land) constitute the central theme of this paper. We shall support our presentation with descriptive and statistical data drawn from field study and published sources. However, a constructed social reality deals with real people, that is, it generates issues and problems involving a substantial proportion of population whose lives become the bottom pit on which this structure stands. The sheer existence of such a proportion of population in the countryside often compel us to offer explanation. Besides, living human aggregates such as caste, class and community etc., who, unlike instinctually automated behaviour of lower organism, are not only capable of being conscious of their life in the bottom-pit but are equally of the same at a collective level through communication, leadership and learning.

Therefore, we aim secondly at examining the changing idioms of agrarian contradictions and conflicts and their broad consequences upon rural social structure in general and upon the system of caste, land and power relationship in particular. This part therefore, of necessity, becomes interpretive and evaluative in nature. Here we address some of these issues.

(i) Some characterise all agrarian reforms in post-colonial India such as abolition of zamindari and fixation of ceiling on land holdings, only as "an organised subtrafuge" against the cultivating *Kisans* and *Mazdoors* (Thorner: 1956 : 82) that have "signally failed" in introducing pro-cultivator tenurial changes (Sen : 1962 : V, Preface). P. C. Joshi characterised these reforms as "a fiasco" and as "a hoax" (Joshi: 1970 : 49, 1973 ; 5). Rene Dumout dubbed these reforms as an exercise in "oral socialism" (Dumout ; 1973 : 224). These are rather extreme and unrealistic statements; for, with the exception of Thorner all

of them had little direct field contact with rural people and their problems. Some of these scholars (such as Joshi : 1970a : 152) have already seen the rise of middle class peasantry in India, still they tried to fill one pond on a plain surface without digging the other one. Had land reform policy been a fiasco and hoax the rise of middle class peasantry would not have been possible.

(ii) If, however, these reforms have been able to bring about a substantial degree of changes in the agrarian social structure of, say north India, the issue at hand is both to examine and possibly determine, the stratum of the strata and the segments of the stratum that benefited most from these reforms as against the stratum and segments that were denied the benefits and continue to remain perennially deprived. Scholars such as Patankar and Omvedt (1978 : 413) recognise the possible changes being unleashed by land reform policies of post-colonial India in the countryside—and direct our attention to the problem of *Dalits* who remain let down by caste Kulaks. Field data from Basti, East Uttar Pradesh (Singh : 1974, 1978, 1980, Singh : 1970 : 258, Sharma : 1969 : 217-22) confirm to the process of large scale pauperisation of ex-zamindars in Uttar Pradesh and in Rajasthan and related to this process, the rise of middle caste secure peasantry as the result to land reforms in the countryside. Basti data (Singh : 1978) led me to the same conclusion that historically oppressed sections of ex-untouchable of Uttar Pradesh could gain little and most frequently nothing from the Zamindari Abolition Act of 1954. Thus, far and wide structural changes took place in the state of Uttar Pradesh pushing up a new rich class of middle caste peasantry, a few gained disproportionately more cultivating land than the other.

(iii) The relevant question is: why were (are) some stratum and segments of agrarian social structure in Uttar Pradesh in a better position to gain most from the land reform policies as compared to the other sections and groups of the same structure? Patankar and Omvedt (1979: 411) attribute the cause of this anomaly to *caste feudalism* in the traditional (caste) feudal system of India, two parallel hierarchies developed. According to them "One was a hierarchy of groups defined in terms of their position *in relation to the land* — ranging from landlords to nominally independent peasants to tenant cultivators in varying stages of semi-serfdom to field servants in varying positions of semi-slavery. The other was a hierarchy of artisans and service workers — ranging from certain priests etc. at the top down to the scale through goldsmiths, barbers; etc., down to weavers, washerman, leather workers and others at the bottom and related to the controller of land through the Jajmani and Balutedari systems which defined their duties" (op. cit. 1971: 409).

These two hierarchies about which other scholars have also made mention of (Elder ; 1977 : 205) one arising on and around the foci of land and the other on the foci of occupation, according to them, were subsumed within the overall *ideology* of Indian caste system. The bottom sections of both the hierarchies, they state, were seen as untouchables irrespective of the fact as whether they were untouchable field servant (such as chamar labourers) or untouchable service caste (such as leather worker *mochis* of north India, Illustration mine). Patankar and Omvedt think that field servants often developed from the service

castes (op. cit. 1978 : 410). Surveying the dalit struggle movement in colonial period and tracing its vicissitude of relation with the freedom struggle and Left Movements they conclude that the entire land policy, whether it was of the National Congress led by the Mahatma or All India Kisan Sabha throughout the colonial period revolved around the slogan of *land to the tillers* — a slogan which excluded the field service castes (the ex-untouchable labourers) from their legitimate right in land they toiled upon along with the cultivating peasant castes. (op. cit. 1978 : 413, 417 & 421).

While I agree with the conclusion of Patankar and Omvedt in their powerful article briefly sketched above (minus of course their advice for future policy of the left parties), I have some reservations in accepting factual ground of explanations of this continuing anomaly of our agrarian society. My doubts hinge around:

(i) The contention that there actually existed or exist parallel structures derived primarily from the relations of production and the relations of occupation. I would hesitate drawing a line between cultivators and carpenters as two distinct categories of rural population as they often interchange their positions. To have a bottom stratum of semi-serfs and semi-slaves as dalit ex-untouchable groups, do we really need to go through difficult procedure cutting apart two sub-structures especially, when both tend to have same top i.e., (the ideology of Hindu caste) and the same bottom stratum i.e. the ex-untouchable field servants and service castes? It seems that the division between the two is based upon too thin an analytical line setting them apart, to be subjected to verification by field data. We shall attempt to examine its relevance in the context of north Indian situation.

(ii) The contention that farm labourers (field servants) whose labour (was) is hired on some system of wage by either the erstwhile class of zamindars or by the cultivating peasants at present (had) have the same right in the land they put their hired labour upon as that of the purchaser of labour power is rather far-fetched, especially when such a "transaction" is viewed from the angle of the nature of contract. Building construction workers do not develop "right" in the structures they build. Even when one attaches a tradition between cultivation of a fixed land holding with a settled population of labourers, in actual practice it becomes difficult to allot the same fixity between the land holding and a specific labourer or a labourer's family; the latter by the sheer fact that the seller of the labour is free. Under these circumstances, therefore, we have to evaluate the very concept of right in land of different sections of agrarian population from a perspective which may allow us to see a broader canvass of different types of right in land of which field servant's right in land may be one.

(iii) Also it is too hypothetical to assume that all the farm labourers (were) are recruited from the sections of only ex-untouchables and that these untouchables have, on account of reasons stated earlier, not been able to secure right in land. The institution of *Gorait*¹ and *Bhataits*² in east Uttar Pradesh highlight the fact that Harijans did and continue to have an enduring direct relation with land given to them by the ex-zamindar of which they are now independent owners. The *Gorait* and *Bhataits* were exclusively recruited from the *chamar* caste. The direct

and stable relation with land provided to them by virtue of being *Gorait* or *Bhatait* of the landlord permitted them to develop "a right in the land"—a right which was denied to floating field servants.

(iv) And finally the last point. North Indian field experiences go against the contention that field servants were generally drawn from the ex-untouchable sections. It might have been the case in South India, but in North, especially in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, farm labourers usually belonged and continue to belong, in addition to ex-untouchable chamars, to such clean caste Hindus of Sudra groups as landless Bhars, Pasis, Kewats, and some times of Ahirs and Gadarias castes. Selling of labour, below the categories of *twice-born*, is a matter of economic position. The rich sudra purchases labourers of his own kin; the poor sells it to all on wage.

What else, then are the explanatory factors? Why do agrarian contradictions remain acute? Patankar and Omvedt through their survey attempted to explain some of the factors. The remaining are yet to be explained.

I shall attempt to answer the questions raised above. My data are drawn from Basti — a typical East Uttar Pradesh district. The effort will be to examine the empirical basis of anomalies and gaps, that menacingly persist in the agrarian social structure. In a democratic system of a welfare State, chances of these gaps issuing forth irreconcilable contradictions and conflicts within groups and communities and strain on our political system are higher than in societies where collective competitive spirit of people is totally subjugated to the interest of ruling single party and to the interest of the rulers of such state who effectively manipulate that party. Increasing caste tensions in Uttar Pradesh, the frequent confrontations between state recognised caste groups such as the *backward* and *schedule* castes in recent years are to be examined in the light of these gaps. I am sketching below the agrarian social structure of Basti in a historical perspective. The sketch shall refer to all of the sociologically relevant issues. Its particular emphasis, shall, however be on tracing the changing balance of caste, land and power in the countryside of Uttar Pradesh. I shall first present a brief outline of its political history of colonial period and shall describe its topographical features. In these contexts, I shall place Basti district for an indepth study of its caste, land and power structure.

II. Uttar Pradesh : Topography and Political History in Colonial Period (1775-1947)

The erstwhile state of *United Provinces of Agra and Oudh*, now the state of Uttar Pradesh, looks on the map of India like a lion sitting with its head in an astride position. Its head up, in North holds the mountainous districts of Garhwal and Kumaon regions at the border of the Tibetan plateau in north. Below the neck, bordering the kingdom of Nepal, its backline runs to easternly direction to a wet Himalayan foot hill tract known as Tarai region. Districts of Pilibhit, Kheri, Bahraich, Gonda, Basti and Gorakhpur belong to this region. The main body is lined by the major north Indian river systems of Ganges, Ghaghara and Yamuna etc., carving out a relatively upland fertile tract known as Doab or Gangetic basin. The belly and legs of this lion below in South are

made up by the districts of Jhansi, Hamirpur, Banda, Allahabad and Mirzapur. These districts are part of the Central Indian Plateau (see Chaturvedi : 1964 : 3-11). Tarai and the mountainous region constitute the Himalayan tract, the rest of the two, moving up from north down to south represent, as indicated above the Gangetic basin and the Central Plateau respectively.

The political history of Uttar Pradesh, during the colonial phase, is marked first, by the East India Company's territorial expansionist policies of *acquisition*, *annexation*, *cedation* and *conquest* (Majumdar : 1962 : 90-122, Metcalf : 1965 : 31-33, Rizvi & Bhargava : 1957-58; 5.v, Neale : 1962 : 13-14, Government of India : 1848 : 79, Pemble : 1977 : 183-90, etc), and secondly, afterward by introduction and implementation of Benthamite utilitarian (Stokes : 1959) 'reforms' and finally by applying the Ricardo's concept of rent in India to enhance the revenue (Metcalf : 1965 : 175-185). Territorial expansion, initially begins with rather slowly and then becomes steady and systematic. It starts in Uttar Pradesh with Warren Hastings's (1772-85) forceful and fraudulent acquisition of the Old Province of Banaras, then held by Raja Chait Singh, the history of the founding of Banaras raj has been discussed by Jain (1976 : 4). In 1775, Asaf-ud-Daula (1775-97), the then Nawab Wazir of Oudh ceded six districts ruled locally by Raja Chait Singh to East India Company. Chait Singh was asked to retain his zamindari right at the annual payment of Rs. 22 lakhs within two years, i.e. from 1775 to 1777. The come out of the Company due against Chait Singh rose to Rs. 50 lakhs, and that included the fine for the non payment of earlier dues (Government of India: 1948 : 92, Majumdar : 1962 : 91) Defiant, Chait Singh refused to make a penal payment. Hastings came himself from Calcutta to exact the money from Chait Singh. And after daring encounter of Chait Singh with the power of the Company, he got himself expelled from his raj in 1781. Octopus Company then poised itself to swallow rest of the territories of remaining Uttar Pradesh.

In 1801, Saadat Ali Khan (1798-1814), the then Nawab Wazir of Oudh ceded almost fifteen districts of Tarai and Doab tract to the Company. After getting a firm foot on these *Ceded Districts*, it launched an attack and between 1803 to 1840 step by step grabbed the districts of Bundelkhand division. These were called *Conquered Districts*. The *ceded* and *conquered* districts formed the erstwhile state of *North-Western Provinces* of the company. The final drama of John Company's expansionism in Uttar Pradesh ends with deceitful takeover of Oudh. The morbidity of British victorian morality is graphically summed up in Samuel Luca's compilation of facts in his *Dacoitee in Excelsis; or the Spoliation of Oudh* (1857), (ed. Nurul Hassan : 1971). The Great Rebellion of 1857 after the annexation of Oudh replaced the company raj by the Raj of the British Crown in 1858. The *United Provinces of Agra and Oudh* emerged as an outcome of unification of *North-Western provinces* with the *Province of Oudh* in 1902.

III. Historicity of the Basic Agrarian Questions

I have tried above to trace the route of territorial expansion of British colonialism in Uttar Pradesh for a specific reason. My purpose is to suggest that much of the post-colonial questions pertaining to the issue of land and its

distribution; to slogans such as land for the man "*behind the plough*" or "*land to the tiller*" including bemoaning comments and strictures of scholar at the alleged failure of land reform policies in India (recorded earlier in this article), and the question pertaining to the concept of *right in land* of various segments and strata of agrarian society are basically carry-over of our expansionist colonial past. These questions of pre-Mutiny period of Uttar Pradesh, appear to be atavistic in origin and seem to have re-incarnated themselves into an idiom of modern 20th century neo-liberalism.

This neo-liberalism of 20th century, post-independent India, in its ethos and orientation seems historically to be an extension of the 19th century utilitarian Benthamite colonial liberalism which first grew in the victorian soil of the Great Britain and was then extended to its Indian colony for the *benefit of its people*.

James Mill, the author of six volumes *The History of British India* (1820), was unassistant to the Examiner of India Correspondence (1819-30) and subsequently (1830-36) occupied the office of the Examiner in East India Company. His son, John Stuart Mill, followed the foot steps of the father and occupied the same offices in the Company during 1853-56 and 1856-58 respectively. They, together provided a paternalistic liberal conceptual scheme based on that, provided a politico moral background for a ruthless reform movements in India, which began with the arrival of lord Bentinct (1828-35) in Calcutta in 1828 (Metcalf :1956 : 4).

The unprecedented era of reform and innovation initiated by Bentinct started eroding the bases of the traditional system of agrarian social structure. For, the rationalistic perspective of British utilitarian liberalism generated, when it was applied to India, a cognitive hiatus : Hiatus between the concept of custom which defined peoples "share", "part", "portion" etc., in the agricultural produce about the practice of which *Final Settlement Reports* of various districts (Benett : 1878 : Para : 68, Millet : 1873 : Para : 186, Currie : 1874 : Para : 111, Wynne : 1871 : Para : 35 etc.) provide vivid descriptions and the concepts of "contract", "rights" "rent", "revenue" and "private property" etc. It was a cultural encounter. The British wanted its colony in its own image and towards that they superimposed their own concepts and symbols. I shall briefly indicate at the contradictions that emerged out of this encounter.

James Mill, the Company Intellectual found Indian peasantry living in a "*hideous state of society*". According to him, they (the peasantry) were "tormented by unrestricted despotic power of Brahmin and princely classes (the Kashtriya castes-insertion mine) (Mills: 1820: Vol. II. 162-58). That, "most enslaved portion of human race", he wrote, needed a "code of law which would release individual energy by protecting its efforts, thus freeing the individual from the despotism of customs and the tyranny of the Brahmins". (Mill: 1820 — Vol : II : 540-44). And he, recommended that for the "unspeakable benefit" of the Indian peasantry a system of law would be a great political blessing (Mill: 1820 : Vol. II : 540-44). James Mill reiterated again and again that improvement in India could take place when the "ryot" (the cultivating peasant) were ensured of their "right in land by the British (Mill : 1820 : Vol. V. 416).

His son, John Stuart Mill, emphasised upon installing what he called a "parental despotism" by the colonial system for the unspeakable benefit of Indian people as his father had spoken of. His volume on *"Utilitarianism, Literacy and Representative Government"* (1957) is colonial liberalism which advises an economic enterprise, the *East India Company* was to assume the parental role for education and the discrimination of western knowledge in India. Eric Stokes (1959 : 40-50) and George, D. Bearce (1961 : 270-80) have brilliantly summarised the deep impact of Mills on the formulation of Company policies pertaining to the application of the alien concept of "rent" "revenue" and "right" in India. Under the influence of Richardian and Malthusian economic theories of rent they (Mills) struggled for the tenants "right" in land via instituting the concept of revenue. (Mill : 1820 : Vol. V. 416, Metcalf : 1965 : 179, Stokes : 1978 : 93).

The liberal doctrine of Mills required radical administrators to translate their utilitarian concepts in practice—in fact the Company under those two intellectuals needed parental despots. For them India required, effective reforms which must be led by men imbued with revolutionary passion and zeal.

In the North-West Provinces, Robert Martin Bird, the Chief Revenue Officer (1833-41) and James Thomason who rose to become Lt. Governor of the same Province (1834-53) and their numerous colleagues and followers—all from Bengal Officer's Cadre emerged as the vanguard of this revolution. According to Thorner (1956 : 133-35) these officers treated talukdars and zamindars as "useless drone on the soil". The observations on the corporate nature of land tenure made by Holt Mackenzie, the Secretary of Board of Commissioners, North-Western Provinces (1818-20) contained in his famous Minutes (Government of India : 1866 : 1-9) was set aside in favour of introducing revolutionary agrarian innovations : the individualisation of land as private property.

All Land Settlement Regulations (see Neale : 1962 : 291-92), from 1822 when Regulation No. VII was enforced to record the "right" "interest" of all who were related to lands and its cultivations, through Martin Bird's Settlement Policy of 1830 in favour of creating occupancy tenant right which came in force in 1833 as Regulation IX, to Thomason's *Direct'ons for Revenue Officers* (August 1849) and its subsequent implementation in 1844 under *Regulation X of North-West Provinces* (Stokes : 1978 : 101-106, Neale : 1962 : 81-85, 120-128), were *Regulations* which transformed land relations based upon local customs to relations based upon market and commercialism (Neale : 1961 : 56-57). They tried to expropriate land from "useless drones" — the zamindars and talukdars in favour of the *man behind the plough* or the *tiller of the land* who became occupancy peasant proprietors, and went on to institute the relative rights of all those sections of agrarian structure who lived on or by land (Neale : 196 : 64). The collective "share" of people in land produce was substituted by "ownership right" over land by individuals and families. Land was thus individualised. This was a great transformation.

Let us examine again the agrarian issues and questions of late 20th century Indian liberalism against this colonial background of early 19th century utilitarian liberalism. A comparative scrutiny of the seemingly two dominant ideological ethos of two different periods of Indian history reveal not the resolution but of the persistence of the question. The Twentieth century solution to unsolved

problems of agrarian structure even after *abolition of intermediary right* of zamindars, talukdar; rajas and jagirdars impelling us to recommend confiscation of land of functionless zamindars (Joshi : 1973a : 11-12) tend to repeat and redramatise again the Thomasonians "contempt which indicated them (the zamindars) as useless drone of the soil." The Regulation VII of 1822 of North-West Provinces spoke of not two-tiller's right in land as Patankar and Omvedt speak (1978 : 413) but of right of more than a half dozen section of rural population in land (Neale : 1961 : 60). And, is it a sheer historical coincidence that in late 70s of the 20th century *Dalits* are being rediscovered for the redemption from the grips of *caste-feudalism* (Patankar & Omvedt : 1978 : 413) — a suggestion so largely posed earlier in 1820 when James Mill wrote to the *tormented peasants* under the weight of their Brahmin and princely classes — the tormentors ? The posing and counter-posing of these issues show that the 19th century colonial utilitarian enthusiasm and zeal of an ever expanding merchantile company, (in our case the East India Company) and their presiding radical intellectuals stands side by side on the same theoretic plank with 20th century post-independent Universal Socialists of different varieties and their guiding intellectuals. The passion and the zeal of the first contributed to seed the Great Rebellion of 1857 (see Metcalf : 1965 : 36-71, Pemble : 1979 : 148-61 etc.) which brought the British Raj (Crown) in 1858 to replace the *company raj* and we must examine the 20th century issues against the background of reverberating caste encounters, massacres, blood sheds and violence in North India—an aftermath of post-Independent Land Reform and State Policies—in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Kanjhawala (Haryana) and other places (see Singh : 1974, 1980, Patankar & Omvedt : 1978). Today, the Gujarat and Rajasthan unrest against the Reservation issue is only the beginning of an hitherto unorganised but seething discontent now moving towards organised protest and revolt (Times of India : New Delhi : Feb. 8 & 25, March 9 and 15, 1981), against the State.

An indepth study of such an issue requires field as well as historiographic data. I am presenting below the same from district Basti — a ceded district from east Uttar Pradesh. I shall attempt to examine the problem around the basic variables of caste, land and power. Against the dynamic background of these variables we shall locate the position of the Dalits or the ex-untouchables in the agrarian social structure of Basti, which of necessity will take us to determine the position of other segments in the same structure.

IV. Caste, Land and Power: Basti in the Colonial Context—(1801-1947)

The arrangement of population into the status hierarchies of numerous caste groups in north India has been and continues to be an alive inclusive system. Conventional Indian social scientists, often under the deep impact of British and American Social Science theorisations, generally either overlooked or underplayed the significance of the economic (Hira Singh : 1979) and political dimensions of the caste system in India. The Caste system in India is much more than seemingly innocent cultural — specific expression of an universal social mechanism of fulfilling the needs of stratification in societies. Being the basic and irreducible unit of Indian Social Structure it has been (is) equally the single most

important seed bed of different types of oppressing social inequalities. From it sprout not only "pure" and "impure", "touchable" and "untouchable" polar groups, but also the "rich" and the "poor", "exploiters" and the "exploited" "ruler" and the "ruled" and "master" and the "subject". Its subtle and relatively unnoticed potentials of generating inequalities in India lies in its capacity to *biologise* the inequalities by evolving a system of social formations which generally draw upon its nourishment from such biological *events* such as birth and genetic or socially recognised genetic inheritance. Viewed from the above perspective, the institutions of jati and gotra, exogamy and endogamy are regulative and reinforcing instruments of arms to guard this Indian body-social. Biological inheritance corresponded to the inheritance of relative social inequalities, therefore they ought to be examined along the fact of persistence of caste hierarchy in India. Let us examine the Basti data to highlight the above point.

During the colonial period (1801-1947), the social structure of Basti closely corresponded to the structure of land relationship on the one hand and to those of power and domination on the other. Caste hierarchies first gave rise to and then overlapped hierarchies of economy and power. The categories of caste, class and power in Basti were and are fused in the central primordial foci of caste and kinship ties. In such a social structure, as I have suggested elsewhere (1974: 47, 1978: 100), class-situation is generally issue oriented and episodic in nature. The death of an issue generally brings the demise of a class. Being transient, class as a concept can at best be used for analytical purposes. The overlap of caste hierarchy upon the economic one is the correspondence between caste and class and vice-versa.

The fusion of caste and class in the colonial context, provided two distinct type of groups of people in Basti. The first consisted of the minority section of the *maliks* who owned and controlled the land and water resources of the district but did not participate in production. They neither tilled the land nor harvested its produce themselves. But they were the lords of the land. The second group was the majority section of the *praja* who tilled the land and harvested its yield but had no right in the land at all. The *malik* group was characterised by its property relations and the *praja* by its productive relations.

In such a social structure, the minority population of *maliks* because of their capacity to exercise ownership right in and control over land and water resources on which the majority *praja* lived for subsistence, developed an enormous capacity to exercise unquestioned power and domination over the latter. In Basti the landlord was the Lord of the *praja*; the control over means of production provided them the means to exercise control over men. Exploitations and oppression of the *praja* at the hands of the *maliks*, thus emanated from the specific nature of social structure. What was socially strange in Basti during the colonial period, was not the presence of raw uses of power by the minority over the majority but their absence, I am presenting below the details of this social structure by identifying its relevant component units. This we shall do against the colonial land policies which initiated some of the basic questions we discussed earlier.

V. The Malikhs: Rajas and Zamindars of Basti

The position of rajas and zamindars during the colonial period was determined by their pre-colonial history of rule and dominations. Ethnogeographers, such as Kashi Nath Singh (1968: 203-20), have suggested the existence of a territorial basis of Rajput clan rule over the cys-Himalayan belt of Tarai tract of eastern Uttar Pradesh now the districts of Basti and Gorkhpur region. Gazetteers of these two districts (Government of India: 1907: 88-96, 1929: 109-114) record wave after wave of arrivals, beginning from 13th to 17th century, of Rajput colonies from western part of India as the result of Muslim invasions there. Morgan, (1901) a British compiler of *Pedigrees and Titles* of Native influentials of *United Provinces of Agra and Oudh* provides informations on their approximate arrivals in Basti and other adjoining districts.

British administrative and academic scholarship, from Badden-Powell (1892), Neale (1962) down to Stockes (1978) have had persistingly tried to grasp the issue pertaining to the right of people in land. "What was the basic land tenure? In whose hands lay the primary domination of soil"? asks Eric Slokes (1978: 3). I shall attempt to de-mystify this enigma of land tenure with the help of ethnographic field and historical data from Basti.

All basic and primary rights in property emerge from the conquest of weak by the powerful. Subsidiary rights branch off at the consent of the conquerors. Power begets its own legitimacies and the cruelties of a conqueror are transformed into ballad of his valour-sung and recited by the vanquished subjects from generation to generation in praise and veneration of the victor.

So was the case in Basti. Indigenous pockets of population of Bhars, Doms, Katars and Tharus etc. (Govenrment of India 1907: 144) living in and along the swampy and malarial tract were colonised by the superior power of fleeing Rajput clans as free soldiers in search of secure dominions. Local folklore contains references, to mass exodus of not only the Kshatriya rajas, their kingmen, but also of their satelite castes, the Brahman priest, the Nai (barbar) the Dhobis (washerman) and possibly the cultivating and cattle tending castes of Ahirs, Kurmis, Gaaria and Murao etc. Proselytisation of tribal and semi-tribal local population by the accompanying Brahman into the Hindu structure went side by side with the uses of the Rajput sword for subjugating the population. Sacred and secular power thus welded the rule of a class over a territory.

The primary right in land therefore was those of the conquering Rajput clans. In order to expand their economy the Rajput deployed the subject population to clear the land for cultivation. Patches after patches of forest must have been cut down to make the farming field. Those who cleared the land, according to the tradition started cultivating for and on behalf of the Rajput coloniser. And in the yield of such land *not one, not two*, but the entire community used to have a *share*, a *part* or what locally called *bhag*. Thus, Nai, Dhobi, Murao, Brahmin priest and sometimes a temple God or a diety residing on a peepul tree used to have a share in the produce of the land. All these natural and supernatural beings received their *bhag*. The term *bhag* has also a connotation of the english term *fortune* or share in land. The concept of "right" in land was an alien concept. In Basti there were only two

concepts; the rule of rajas, his kinsmen over the territory and over the people who belonged to that territory and below them the subject classes who did not rule but cultivated the land ruled by the rajas and his clan. Custom defined the *share* of the latter as conquest defined the rule of farmer in and over the land and its produce.

Settlement Officers working in the field at local level (such as Benett: 1878: Para : 68, Millet : 1873: Para : 186 Currie : 1874 : Para : 111 and Wynne :1871: Para : 35 etc) had amply and extensively recorded the fact of *corporate share* of various segments of village population in the land produce.

The British officers faithfully observed the right facts. But being part of the *other culture* they become victim of a semantic trap. While their observations were correct their inferences were clay modelled in their own British image. The corporate system of *share in land produce* based upon customs was theorised into the concept of *corporate right in land* by people. This was wrong, for, before the arrival of the Company raj there did not exist any "right" or "ownership" in the current sense of their meaning except those of the ruler who was himself subject to the rule of customs of the land. Wynne, the Settlement Officer of Basti district records the portioning of the produce, first of the raja and then of rest of the agrarian segments (1871 : 35-40). Thus, the Kshatriya raja and his clans men exercised the absolute and the total rule over the land by the customs of conquest, and a great variety of people with still greater varieties of their share divided the "heap of grain]produce". The major share belonged to the ruler. For he was the lord of the land; he had conquered it and got it cleared for the cultivation

It was against this pre-colonial background that the Company raj reached into Basti and started freezing a rather fluid system of shares, parts and portions of people in the produce into the concept of "right" "ownership" in order to raise the wealth of the Company by increasing revenue by injecting revenue by injecting an auxiliary concept of "tax" "rent" and "revenue". And these introduced transformation in the structure of land relationships.

I shall briefly survey this great transformation with my eye in Basti and its people, which I have witnessed.

In 1801, when Basti was ceded to the Company, Kshatriya caste (Rajputs) alone filled the category of his maliks. The clan head was referred to as raj and the remaining members were called as Thakur Zamindars (Morgan : 1901 : Gol : 1907 : 78). The famous Minutes of Holt Mackenzie, the Secretary of the Board of Commissioner North-West Provinces during 1818-1820 recorded the total and pervasive power of these Kshatriya landlords (see Singh : 1978 : 102). They exercised rule and control over not only land and forest but also on ponds, forest and fisheries as well. And their rule and control over the basic economic resources, in addition to their warrior tradition of wielding swords and sabres on unyielding people accorded to them the power to rule and control over the peasantry. This 3.12 per cent of Kshatriya maliks who accounted in the census of 1901, controlled a total number of 7638 villages of Basti district (Government of India : 1907 : 116). The British iron-jacketed their customary, relatively undefined rule over conquered land by the use of sword power, into bureaucratic

legal categories of the zamindari right. The Company's Benthamite liberal radicalism started reducing the power of customary ruler of the land—the pests and parasites of Basti by the year 1803, 1806 and 1809 when temporary settlement were carried out. The first reduced the revenue free villages held by the maliks and in addition levied heavy taxes upon them (Singh : 1978 : 105). In 1822 Regulation VII was brought in force to record the rights of all those who had productive relation in land of the village which was *individualised* and was subject to fragmentation into units. These unit among cultivators were not the *sharers* in the produce but the *rent-payers* of the land.

I shall quote a part of that revolutionary *Regulation VII of 1822* below for students of agrarian social structure of post-Independent India, especially for those who are concerned with the issue of right in land of people.

“Whereas a moderate assessment being equally conducive of the true interest of Government, the efforts, of the Revenue officers should be chiefly directed, not to any general and extensive enhancement of the Jumma (total revenue demand insertion mine) but to the subjects of equalizing the public burthens, and of ascertaining, setting and recording the *rights, interests, and properties* of all persons are classes, *owning, occupying, managing or cultivating* the land (emphasis mine) or gathering and disposing of its produce, or collecting or appropriating the rent or revenue payable on account of land, or the produce of land, or paying or receiving any cesses, contributions, or prequisitia to or from any person or resident in, or owning, occupying, or holding parcel of any *village or mehaul* (estate)”.

Source : Regulation VII of 1822, The Regulation of the Government of Ford William in Bengal, in Force at the End of 1853, 2: Regulation from 1806 to 1834, prepared by Richchard Clarke, London, Jand H. Cox. 1854.

It was this Regulation that initiated the process which led to a slow but sure decline of Kshatriya territorial power and opened the way for the upward economic mobility of first the Brahman castes and along with them the remaining Hindu castes. The story unfolds in the following way.

During the first three years of the Company arrival in Basti (1801-83) the revenue system was enforced on the talukdari pattern, wherein the maliks paid a fixed lumpsum to the Government of Fort William in Bengal. In 1803 this revenue of Basti was Rs. 2,26,660. After 86 years, in 1889, the revenue went sky high to Rs. 19,91,195 (Government of India: 1967 : 115-20). This enormous increase was effected by introducing innovations in the land policy. A review of this policy ought to be presented. However, this presentation of the review must be examined against the background of two other major agrarian events :

- (i) R.M. Bird's *Settlement of 1830* according occupancy inferior right in land to the tillers. *Regulation IX* of 1833 to regulate exaction of revenue and James Thomason's *Directions to Settlement Officers in 1814*. (see Neale : 1962: 291-92).
- (ii) Secondly, in persuance of the basic spirit contained in the *Regulation VII of 1822* and the recommendation and enforcement of radical pro-peasant agrarian laws initiated by the Company radicals recorded above (i) the

Company not only gave birth to occupancy tenants in the countryside but also increased the volume of zamindars by converting *birta* (grantee) right held generally the Brahman caste into zamindari right like those of Kshatriya Rajas and Thakur zamindars.

- (iii) And finally the great upsurge of the expropriated Rajas and zamindars against the Government of Fort William in 1857 forcing the Crown of Great Britain to extend, its hitherto then tacit, a direct support to the Company by declaring the Paramountcy of Crown over Indian 1858 (see Singh : 1978 : 94).

The above survey yields following facts :

- (i) The basic and primary right in land emerged from the customs of conquest. Kshatriya Rajas and clansmen who colonised the tract bestowed upon themselves (an universal features of all mighty people and now nations and tribes) the absolute right to rule over land and people.
- (ii) Below the rulers, the rest of the groups and segments have had direct and indirect relation with the productive process of agriculture and all had had/have, instead of any "right" in the means of production i.e. in land, "share" in its produce. Such a situation ruled out the chance of this caste or that non-caste having more intense relation with land than the other. For the means of production was under corporate share under the overall rule of the Kshatriya who alone was the master of not only the land but also of the people who lived on the lord's land.
- (iii) The Company under the Benthamine humanistic, utilitarian radicalism, aided with western apparatus of bureaucratic administrative system transformed the agrarian *customs* into *contractual* notion of property. Land was, in this process individualised into private property.
- (iv) And finally in course of their reformative and revenue oriented agrarian reforms they undercult the territorial power of Kshatriya Rajas and zamindar. They upgraded the Brahamans *birta* right into zamindari right. Created a context for the emergence of an independent secure peasantry after the exappropriation of Kshatriya from the control and rule over land and the corporate body of territorial produce. The Company then underwent a severe trauma—the Rebellion of 1857.

I have deliberately avoided presenting the ethrographic details of the Kshatriya and Brahmanical rule over Basti, as they have already been presented earlier (Singh : 1978). Instead, I shall direct my analysis of the position of *praja* during the colonial period. This we shall do first, to trace the course of change in caste, land and power nexus at the one hand, and secondly to settle the context of relevance of the issues we discussed in this article earlier.

VI. The Praja : Subject Castes and Groups

British agrarian reforms were a continuing process. That began in 1822 and with fits and start continued upto 1889. Final touches were added in 1929 when national independence movement had stood high before the colonial

power. With this agro-historical background, let us first illustrate the continuing process of changes in the social structure, erosion of traditional power the consequent slow emergence of new groups—castes and sections on the scene of Basti. In 1901 maliks of the both types; the precolonial Rajas and clansmen who conquered the tract and the new zamindars—(mostly the Brahman priests of the traditional Kshatriya rulers who gained zamindari right in birta (grantees) land in 1842) together contributed 14.4 per cent to the population of the district. Despite all Thomsonian radicalism to throw off the past and parasites of the soil from the possession of land, these two malik castes together occupied as much as 64 per cent of the agricultural land. As opposed to them, 86.6 per cent of rest of the subject castes and groups who had secured occupancy right in around 36% of land by 1901.

The position of the praja was determined by first, their caste position in the traditional Hindus hierarchy and corresponding to this, secondly by their access to the means of economic production—i.e. ownership of and control over the land. The majority population which had nothing to claim in name of right in land during the pre-colonial and first three decades of colonial period slowly, during a span of more than hundred years (the final British agrarian reform in United Provinces of Agra and Oudh was instituted in 1920), could catch hold of only just 36% of cultivable land in Basti district under occupancy tenure from the maliks (Charan Singh: 1959: 67). Nowhere in Uttar Pradesh did the transfer of secure peasant tenure exceeded 40% to the praja section (Govt. of India: 1948: 603). The gap between the malik and praja during the colonial period, thus remained too wide. The social, the economic and political distance between the two gave rise to hardening of exploitative agrarian practices—a process which must have institutionalised the factors of caste and ritual superiority of the maliks resulting from their initial conquests over the local population into a full blown system of masterdom and serfdom in Basti. I am presenting the social structural features of praja sectors of Basti below.

Like elsewhere, the praja population was externally divided by horizontal communal division i.e. into the majority Hindu and the minority Muslim sections. The Hindu praja section, from trade and business groups top below the malik (see Singh : 1978 : 108) scaled down into as much as 38 different Hindu cultivating caste groups—all arranged into a descending order of increasing inherited inequalities of purity-pollution linked ritual status and distances from the upper caste maliks.

In Basti, besides 17.4% of Muslim peasants, the majority of the Hindu cultivating castes included the *Ahirs*, the *Kurmis* and *Gadaria* etc. The Ahirs and Kurmis have been the key cultivating castes of the 38 unequal castes of this group. They together make up about 20% of the entire population of the district and, being ritually closer to the malik castes, have had maximum productive relation with the malik's land. This relation gave them more opportunity to secure occupancy tenure in land under the colonial land reform rules and regulations discussed earlier in the preceeding pages. In 1901, they had already acquired ownership right in 4% of all the cultivatable land of the district.

Social and cultural concepts and motions, collectively cherished and transmitted from generation to generation in the north Indian countryside, promoted a differential to accumulate cultivatable land in the hands of clean and touchable cultivating castes as opposed to the sections of population held traditionally as profane and pollution carrying ex-untouchables. The norms and values of Hindu society determined a good deal of the distribution of opportunities to receive the owner-ship right in land and these have had thus influenced the economic and political relations of people in rural Uttar Pradesh. I am identifying some of the dominant notions below :

(i) In Hindu scheme of rural life in north India land is symbolic equivalent of Dharti-Matta (mother earth). It is held sacred. The mythologically inherited traditional mother symbol of land and territories often get anthropomorphised. Indian map, thus becomes photo-copy of *Bharat Matta* in the modern secular India. In such a society, it is held in the countryside that land should preferably remain under the protection of Kshatriyas Brahman castes and tolerably (if the society of the time could not help) with the clean cultivating castes. Ahirs and Kurmis were the preferred ones and had dug deep root into the religico-cultural psyche of upper caste landlords who allowed the latter's plough to till their conquered land. And it was that land under the latter's plough which was changed into occupancy tenure by the British agrarian reforms.

Negatively, the same concepts and notions excluded the untouchables—the Dalits from getting any chance, first, to till the land as *cultivator*, except as malik's serf and secondly in the absence of the first, to stake their claim of tenure in land. Culturally, the claim ownership of land by the Harijan Dalits was thought to be against the ethos of Hindu society which guarded its mother image against the ex-untouchable's supposed defilement. This excluded them from getting occupancy right in land during the colonial period.

(ii) In oral history the arrival of Ahirs, Kurmis as cultivators, Nai (barber) and Dhobis (washerman), Barahi (carpenter), Lohar (ironsmith) and the Brahman (priests), etc., are linked and tied up with the arrival, conquest and colonisation of the conquered tracts of Kshatriya chiefs and clans. According to local folklore, exuntouchables were the original tribal and semi-tribal inhabitants of the first tract who suffered defeat by the superior power of the Kshatriya warriors. The defeated were held no bondage and pushed down to the status of unseeable and untouchable exterior castes.

The commonly shared history of ethnic movements in course of which (according to the sayings in Basti) caste Hindus helped the Kshatriyas in their war and conquest developed a primordial sense of mutual loyalties. The oral traditions of the region in which Basti district is located contains a number of sacrifices made by the caste praja to protect the honour and respect of their maliks. These confused mass of folklore, stories and sayings have cemented the traditional ties between the upper caste maliks and lower caste praja as compared to those who were not parties in those days of Exodus. The historicity of longer contact, experiences and shared loyalties transmitted from generation to generation yielded concessions from the maliks in favour of the cultivation castes.

Negatively, the ex-untouchable have had no such primordial ties or history of their loyalties except that of their subjugation. The social and cultural distance of the Dalits from the ex-maliks reflected their distance from the possibilities of getting right in the land.

And finally, the large size families of Ahirs and Kurmis provide them enormous agricultural manpower with no taboo (as is the case with upper castes) against manual labour. A peculiar cunning towards capital accumulation and absence of the practice of conspicuous consumptions and waste, lumped together with an acquisitive agricultural enterprising spirit, made them successful beneficiaries, both in the rise of the maliks during the pre-colonial period and also in their fall during the colonial and post-colonial periods.

Negatively the Harijan sections, with floating families from the bondage of one maliks to others and from one village to the other, which was their conditions during the colonial period, could not develop a stable and solid base in the rural Uttar Pradesh. What was the enduring and relatively permanent fate in their lives was the bondage in which they lived.

These historical experiences conditioned, and cultural values and norms led to the differentiations within the underdog praja section in Uttar Pradesh in general and in Basti in special. This differential play of history and culture bore heavily upon concrete agrarian relations. Caste peasants were brought closer to both, maliks as well as to the land; the non-castes, now the Dalit were thrown at a distance again both from the maliks and from his land. They are now, as a result, on the list of Schedule Castes of the independent India.

Dispersed as they are, with five or six houses of Harijans, Bhanggis, etc., in each village dominated by caste population they are leaderless and hence in the absence of organising leadership, they are powerless. But the historical deprivations of this almost 21% of Basti population are infusing restiveness as is the case with rest of their sections in the adjoining districts of Uttar Pradesh. This ought to be examined against the background of the often violent revolts and uprisings of peasants with whom they shared the praja status during the colonial period and the impact of those protests which brought about the abolition of zamindari in 1954 in post-Independent India.

VII. Post-Independence Context of Caste, Land and Power (1947-1970)

Before we portray the major agrarian changes, deriving from the politicization of peasantry against the zamindars which was reflected in an increasing peasant's groundswell in Uttar Pradesh (Singh : 1978, Siddiqui : 1978) and the abolition of zamindari in 1954 which initiated popularization of maliks and rise of a secure caste peasantry in Uttar Pradesh (Singh : 1974: 52) and elsewhere (Sharma : 1969 : 217-22) we have to put two factors on record, for the purposes of maintaining clarity in tracing the historical background of emerging agrarian factors and forces.

(i) The first refers to the post-Mutiny (1853) attempts of the colonial system to suspend and withdraw the radical pro-peasant-agrarian policies of R. M. Bird and James Thomason, which ex-appropriated the Kshatriya rulers from their customary rule over the land and peoples. That exappropriation of

rulers according to the British administrator, made the native nobility rebel against the colonial power (see Metcalf : 1965 : 188-91, Pemble : 1978 : 252). Chief Commissioners of Oudh, such as Sir Robert Montgomery (1858-59) and Sir Charles John Wingham (1859-66) who have had face to face encounters with the rebels, found the stability of the Crown in the *Restoration* of the zamindars. And that is how fluid customary rule of the zamindars over the land was frozen into the bureaucratic records of village Patwaris (village land record keepers) and District Magistrates of the colonial administration. Zamindars and Talukdars emerged for the first time as a land owning legal category of rural economic and power structure of north India. In their restoration, the British established a buffer to act in their behalf (partially) to rule over the majority peasants. And that buried the Benthamine radical utilitarians dreams about India.

(ii) The second factor refers to the emergence of the *British India Association*, the parent body of the *Indian National Congress* in 1885, just twenty eight years after the *First War of Independence* of 1857 (see Neale : 1962 : 14-15). Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru at the national level and of leaders such as Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, Ajit Prasad Jain, Hukum Singh, Charan Singh and Kamalapati Tripathi, etc., at the state level, the Congress mobilized for Independence from both, the British Empire and the creature of their colonial bureaucracy—the rajas and the zamindars (Dhanagare : 1975). My interest here, in the Independence Movement is to bring in focus the rebirth of Colonial Benthamine utilitarian ideology in the ideology of the Congress—the dominant political party of the 30s and 40s of the 20th century India.

The radical pro-cultivator agrarian idioms and slogans, first seen in our survey, in the recommendations of intellectuals such as James Mill and administrators such as R. M. Bird and James Thomson of the Company Raj, were Indianised and refoisted high on the futuristic scene of utopian conception of Ram-Rajya (Hindu conception of an ideal state) by the leaders of the National Congress. Their guiding slogans at the agrarian front were; "*land to the tiller*," or land for "*the man behind the plough*". Despite initial pre-Mutiny pre-cultivators agrarian reforms after the Mutiny had given rise to structural contradictions within agrarian relations. The contradiction was that the minority sections of Kshatriya and Brahman upper caste zamindars had acquired property right in land which they did not till. The majority population of the praja sections of caste and non-caste (ex-untouchables who were by virtue of their involvement in the productive process as the real tillers) did not have property right in land. This imbalance, or anomaly between property and productive relations of the malik and the praja, under the impact of the National Congress peasant politicisation campaigns resulted in large scale peasant uprising in Basti. I shall recapitulate a few essential points from my earlier study (1978).

VIII. Peasant Mobilization : Nijai-Bol Movement of Basti District—1946

The structural contradiction persisting in Basti agrarian relations indicated above had given rise to exploitative modes of agrarian practices. While the

major portion of the agricultural land owned by the zamindars were tilled by the praja, the latter had no security over the acres he tilled. Village *dahars*, (bullock cart tract), *usar* (waste-land) *banjar* (saline land) and *charagah* (pastures) including the forest and ponds were owned by the maliks. These were besides their ownership right in 65% of all the cultivatable land. Huts and houses of the praja were located on *abadi* land (house-site) of the maliks.

The praja was prisoner of his own location. His home, the road he walked on, the pastures on which his cattle grazed, the water of the well and pond for his drinking and agricultural irrigations—all that was around him were not his own but belonged to his maliks. Under such a bondage, he was subject to ritualised exploitations. He was forced to provide *begar* (free labour) and was made to pay *biahu*, a payment to the malik in cash or kind when malik's daughter was married, *hathiahi* and *ghorahi* a payment to the malik when the latter made a purchase of an elephant and horse respectively; and *pujahi* a payment towards financing religious functions performed by the maliks. These exploitative practices resorted to by the maliks were prevalent all over Uttar Pradesh (see Siddiqui: 1978: 101). They were in addition to arbitrary imposition of *lagan* (land tax).

The local Congress leadership at the district level mobilised the peasants against the zamindars and against the exploitative practices. The peasantry which have had remained passive all along the colonial period under the zamindar's rule, for the first time developed an awareness of their deprivations and identified the zamindars as responsible for their miserable position in the countryside of Basti. In 1946 the Basti peasantry rebelled against the zamindars, their exploitative practices, and the continuing contradictions of property and productive relations. The uprising of the Basti peasants caused eleven deaths and several hundred maliks and kisans were injured (Singh: 1978: 117).

The British, who were already visualising their departure from India, instituted a land record operation which involved a plot to plot verification of ownership of land. The peasants, being in the majority rallied more on the spot witnesses to substantiate their declaration of ownership (Nijai-Bol) over the land owned by the maliks.

This movement led to a large scale on the spot transfer of land proprietary right from maliks to the praja in Basti. But while the peasant mobilization against the maliks consisted of all the sections of the praja including the Harijans and other ex-touchables when it started yielding benefits, the caste cultivators the Ahirs and Kurmis pushed out the former from getting proprietary right in malik's land. They dug out the traditional cultural notions of dominant upper caste zamindars that land under the untouchables possession would be defiled land. And this cultural trick of caste Hindus deprived the ex-untouchables of the land. While caste peasants began getting rich the exterior caste continued to remain in their perennial poverty. And that kept the agrarian contradiction unresolved.

Abolition of Zamindar and the Rise of Conservative Caste Peasants

The National Congress won Independence from the colonial rule in 1947

and in order to fulfil its promises to the peasants, it abolished the system of zamindari in 1954 and fixed a ceiling on the size of *Land Holdings* in Uttar Pradesh. The motive behind the fixation of ceiling was to squeeze out the surplus land from the zamindars in favour of giving land to man behind the plough and to its tiller. The report of the United Provinces Zamindari Abolition Committees (Government of India: 1948: Vol.I) accepted 10 acres of land as the size of economic holding. Its convictions were based upon following types of agrarian data. I shall examine those that relate to Basti.

Table No. 1
Size of Land-Holding in Basti District in 1948 Prior to the Abolition of Zamindari (in %)

<i>Land-Holdings of less than 1 acre of area</i>	<i>Land-Holdings of 6 acres or less area</i>	<i>Land-Holdings of 10 acres or less area</i>
51.00	91.00	97.00

Source : (Govt. of India : 1948 : 25)

The Committee had accepted 10 acres as the minimum size of an economic land-holding and on account of this commitment, it could address all its celebrated slogans of doing away with the alleged parasitical class in order to release land in favour of the "*man behind the plough*" to just 3 per cent of the district's cultivators (Table No. 1). I may record here that the Basti data presented above represented the size of land-holding pattern of entire Uttar Pradesh (Govt. of India: 1948: 25). The data presented below highlight the foredoom of the then much published Zamindari Abolition Act (1954) of Uttar Pradesh :

Table No. 2
Acres of Land Available and the Acres of Land Required for Changing Uneconomic Holdings into Economic one after the Fixation of Ceiling on Land

<i>Acres of land released from the then (in 1948 proposed implementation of ceiling</i>	<i>Acres of land required to transform uneconomic holdings into economic</i>
1,07,453	46,46,593

Source : (Govt. of India : 1948 : 387-88)

A glance at the data of Table No. 2 establishes the fact beyond doubt that there existed only a marginally conceivable relation between the volume of land

required by the state after it abolished the institution of zamindari and implemented ceiling on the holdings of land with the volume of land it could get to feed the land hunger of the peasant it had aroused in course of its *struggle for Independence*. Consequently, when in 1954, intermediary right in land was done away with, it amounted to an exercise more in politics of land than land reform for the landless. State of Uttar Pradesh failed in relating its land policies in the benefits of poorest of the poor — the Harijans and other landless castes now on the list of schedule castes.

Abolition of zamindari cut down deeply the entrenched top 3 per cent of territorial magnates of upper caste zamindars, reduced the hold of the majority of the middle rank zamindars of the same castes on the peasantry, generated compelling situations for large scale sale of land by them to those who had purchasing power — and in doing so, it gave rise to a class of *kulaks* — the Ahirs and Kurmis who were out to surpass their ex-masters — the Kshatriya and Brahman ex-zamindars in oppressing the historically neglected segments of the ex-untouchables in Basti.

The new Kulak is a *chowdhary* or a *mahtons*. On account of dominant socio-cultural notions prevalent in Basti which we have referred of earlier these two clean cultivating castes who had been preferred tillers of land by the upper caste Rajas and zamindar during the colonial phase and has secured occupancy tenure in land were potentially well poised to outwit the bottom segments of Harijans and many other ex-untouchable castes in the expansion of their land holdings. They had money to purchase the land from the ex-zamindar who parted it off by selling in order to escape from the land ceiling law. Their large joint family structure giving them free labour, sparing a few of them to go to urban centres to earn and send back the cash earning to the village and their capacity to economise the agricultural production expenditure in favour of capital accumulation and to further investment have led them to become a *swelled caste group*. This rich middle-lower caste cultivators group is conservative, politically alive and being numerically strong, a reckonable force to arbitrate for its interest vis-a-vis the future success of a political party candidate in the Elections for Legislative Assembly at the state level or for the membership of the Parliament. They have not only expanded their acreage from the ex-zamindars but have in this process expropriated the scheduled castes from their meagre holding either by purchase which, the latter does when driven to hunger and destitution or through the legal connivance of the village patwaris (land record keeper). Following land holding-data of 1960 are suggestive of this exploitative process.

Table 3
Changes in the Number of Cultivators Having Different size of Land-Holdings
Between 1951 and 1960 in Basti District.

Sl. No.	Size of land holdings	No. of Cultivators in 1951	No. of Cultivators in 1960	Changes in the No. of Cultivators + = Increase — = Decrease
1.	Above 1000 acres	3	2	—
2.	50 to 100 acres	113	64	—
3.	25 to 50 acres	381	221	—
4.	20 to 25 acres	10177	789	—
5.	15 to 20 acres	2447	1,797	—
6.	10 to 15 acres	5741	4,891	—
7.	5 to 10 acres	12,458	17,039	+
8.	1 to 5 acres	45,297	66,690	+
9.	Below 1 acre	64,947	54,258	—

Source : (Govt. of India : 1965 : 140)

Basti data on land-holding changes between 1951 and 1960 (Table No. 3) reveals : First, the general decline of number of land-holders of 15 or above acreage of holdings. Secondly, and this is more disturbing, is the revelation that the lowest segment of land-holders, generally consisting of ex-untouchables agricultural labourers who are also marginal cultivators have had also suffered the decline in numbers.

While the reasons for the decline of the first is understandably accountable to the positive consequences of abolition of zamindari and fixation of ceiling on land-holdings in 1954 besides fragmentation through partition etc., the decline of the second can possibly be explained only negatively. The segment of population with land-holdings of 1 to 10 acres increased in number. In course of their increase they not only purchased the land released by the upper caste ex-zamindars but seem to have eaten up the land of the Dalits who could not defend their land traditionally acquired from their ex-masters. They continue to remain oppressed in their historically built confines of Hindu caste system and the culture which maintains this system. The analysis of rural inequalities (see Chakravarty : 1981) and their social bases ought to take into account the severity of inequalities rather than the truistic concept of inequality itself.

Caste confrontations such as encounters between the Dalits and Caste peasants and a recent tendency in our political culture to organise these conflicting segments of rural society around what has come to be known as *Backward and Scheduled caste/class* is aiding and abetting this social contradiction. Economic and political power, thus have gained a convergence upon the system of caste inequalities in the countryside of north India. No wonder *Land Grab Movement*, led by left oriented political parties in 1970 (Singh : 1974) in Basti failed. For, powerful caste groups constituting the majority population did not favour the Harijan who participated in that movement against caste land-holders.

Conclusion

Our survey of the colonial and post-colonial periods of Basti district and against its historical background, the analysis of changing equations of caste, land and power relations indicate a consistent and systematic erosion of landed power of upper castes in north India. The British Raj was not one homogeneous politico-ideological and economic system in the Indian modern history. The phase of Company Raj (1775 to 1859 in Uttar Pradesh) was in a sense fairly radical in dispossessing Kshatriya and Brahman from their control over land and people. The phase of the rule of the British Crown (1858-1947) evolved seemingly soft attitude towards the dispossessed sections, and developed a restoration policy of the zamindars and rajas. But in effect they too followed the radical anti-zamindar measures in line with the erstwhile company intellectuals and administrators.

The attack of the colonial system on the traditional power structure gave opportunities to cultivating caste peasants to accumulate economic potential. Socio-cultural forces of north Indian countryside and the norms of Hindu hierarchy helped the caste peasant as compared to the Dalits to secure more and more land from the upper castes. Dalits remained neglected.

During and around the beginning of the post-colonial phase, the caste peasants enlarged their hold over land, either by organised protest, as was the case with Nijai-Bol Movement (Singh : 1978) or by purchase of land from upper castes who sold off their land to escape from land ceiling laws after the abolition of zamindari. In doing so, the caste peasant kicked back the Dalit and kept them down to their perennial misery. For they too found the ex-untouchable unworthy of possessing land held sacred by the Hindu peasants.

This emergent powerful segment of caste peasants; the Mahtons and Chowdharys of Ahirs, Kurmis, and Jat castes in north India are the New Princes. As Kulaks, they are out to surpass their past-masters—the Kshatriyas and Brahman zamindars of colonial period. Issue of schedule castes vs. backward castes/classes ought to be examined against this background.

Sociologically, even more crucial is my second point. Survey of north India reveals that whenever there is an external attempt to expropriate and dispossess people from their culturally defined and collectively approved systems of legitimate right over things and privileges, there has been mass unrest and people have revolted against such measures. End of the Company Raj after the mass upsurge of 1857 is an example.

How far contemporary protests and revolts against legalised discriminations—the issues of reservations; of differential rights and privileges of groups on the basis of birth and ascriptions are explainable in the light of our historical experiences of past ? More than thirty years of exposure of Indians to the values of equality and secularism are being bent to serve caste privileges. Are Indians becoming aware of being exappropriated and dispossessed from certain rights and privileges to fight a caste war ? I suggest that this question may be examined elsewhere in detail.

Thus the phenomenon of the caste peasantry is the new focus of rural India today. The frequent occurrence of caste violence whether sporadic or on issues like reservations can be understood mainly in this light. The fact that political drives for equality have experienced setbacks in India can be explained if we look at the agrarian base of this rising force.

And finally a question that arises from the Basti data : What material and ideological interests and conditions led to the early 19th century Company scholars such as Mill, to blame the upper castes for all the miseries of the tormented peasantry in India and how do the 20th century Marxists (such as Patankar and Omvedt : 1978) echo similar feelings when they attribute tormentations of the Dalits to "caste feudalism" in 1978 ? Obviously history is not static. Even if some of the oppressive caste relations are still prevalent the agrarian change in India has added new dimensions to it.

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1. *Bhataits* are Harijan agricultural labourers, who put their entire labour force in the agricultural operations of the upper caste maliks. Such Harijans, instead of being paid daily wage, are given one fifth share of the total produced by their respective land masters. Bhataits are, thus given relatively higher status as compared to Harijan labourers on daily wage. Besides, the one fifth share in the produce, these bhataits were (are) traditionally given small rent free land, holding for their exclusive benefits. Bhataits belong to Harijan caste in Basti.

2. *Coraitis*, like the Bhataits are from Harijan caste. They (were and still are) foot servants who, instead of wielding the plough of the malik on his seer land, performed supervisory roles such as recruiting daily wage labourers, getting work done by those labourers and some time played the role of master's messenger. Gorait is the immediate master of the farm labourers of maliks and held superior rank among the underdog labourers.

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Caste and Politics in West Bengal

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On several aspects of contemporary politics, West Bengal appears to fall outside the general all-India pattern. Ask an informed observer whether caste has any great influence on present-day West Bengal politics and he likely is to tell you, "Very little". Perhaps he will go on to describe the depth of class feelings in West Bengal, both in political organisations and in the ideas which people have about political issues. He will point out the strength there of the Left parties which have successfully mobilised support for their programmes along class lines, cutting across divisions of caste and community. In a highly politicised atmosphere surcharged with not-too-distant memories of considerable political violence, there have been in West Bengal no attacks on Harijans as a target of caste antagonism, no Parasbighas or Kafaltas.

Like many other answers to such general questions about politics, however, this too is only a very partial answer, both true and false. For an institution like caste operates at many levels. It is not true that caste elements cannot be found in the structure or functioning of political organisations in West Bengal or that they are entirely absent from the political beliefs of the people. On the other hand, it is perfectly valid to point out the rather remarkable differences which West Bengal politics bears from their pattern in most others of the country. Let us, therefore, look at the question in somewhat greater detail.

While we hear so little of caste oppression on the poorer sections of the population in West Bengal today, one persistent observation about modern Bengali society and polity, strangely enough, has concerned the phenomenon of upper-caste domination. History shows that the new opportunities opened up by European trade in the eighteenth century, and later by the Permanent Settlement of landownership and an expanding network of bureaucracy and the professions, were avidly seized upon by the Hindu upper castes, and by the second half of the nineteenth century, the ubiquitous *bhadralok*—the "gentle" the "respectable"—had established unchallenged command over virtually every field of public life in the province. For the most part, the *bhadralok* had rentier interests in land, of varying sizes and rank, and they were principally from the

three castes of Brahman, Baidya and Kayastha. But the key to *bhadralok* status was education, and in the new economic and political conditions of colonial Bengal, it was English education which became the ultimate stamp of respectability. Numerically, the three upper castes put together comprised well below 10% of the population of undivided Bengal—the Baidyas, in particular, were a small group numbering slightly over 1 lakh, most of whom then lived in the districts of eastern Bengal. But the upper castes had proportionately many more literates than the other castes, and of their working population the bulk was in the higher professions (Table 5). These proportions were to grow over time. The English civil servants who in 1915 made that somewhat off-quoted characterisation of the Bengali *bhadralok* were not entirely inaccurate: they had called it “a despotism of caste, tempered by matriculation”.

When organised politics of the modern kind made its appearance in nineteenth-century Bengal, not only was it dominated entirely by the *bhadralok* of a rather special kind—wealthy, with extensive landed property or trading interests, and highly educated and successful in urban professional life. This was the rather small group of people, mostly resident in the city of Calcutta, who began the first political associations in the province which were soon to merge into the early Indian National Congress. Their politics was genteel and entirely peaceable. It was with the Swadeshi Movement following the partition of Bengal in 1905 that mass agitation and mobilisation became part of organised politics. It was through this movement that provincial politics reached the district towns, although there too its adherents were drawn predominantly from the ranks of the *bhadra* and the educated.

Around the time of Swadeshi, indeed from within that movement, there also emerged another trend which became extremely important in the organised politics of the province. This was the politics of revolutionary terrorism. This politics, again, was confined almost exclusively to upper-caste Hindu *bhadralok* youth. This was so not merely by a quirk of the regional social structure. Until at least the late 1920s, the terrorist groups consciously shunned mass activity. One reason for this was organisational, prompted by the requirements of secret conspiratorial work. But ideologically, too, there was considerable scepticism, even contempt, about the political maturity of the masses and about the feasibility of effective political action on the basis of organised mass agitation. The noble task of freeing the country from the grip of foreign invaders necessarily lay with the enlightened few, organised into secret groups of selfless patriots fully trained in the complex skills of prolonged underground activity and planned violence. The levels of education, culture and articulate political thinking required for this purpose almost inevitably restricted the membership of these terrorist organisations to the high-caste *bhadralok*.

In the early 1920s, Non-cooperation and Khilafat inaugurated the process of bringing wider sections of Bengal's peasantry into the fold of organised political movements. Naturally, the composition of different strata of the political leadership, and certainly that of the rank-and-file participants, underwent considerable change. The former exclusiveness of *bhadralok* politics was no longer tenable. But while organised politics drew larger sections of the people, it also evolved a

complex and differentiated structure, and acquired many layers of significance in organisation as well as in ideology. In looking for the relevance of caste in the politics of Bengal since the 1920s, it is to this somewhat complicated structure of organised politics that we must look into.

A glance at table 1 will show the broad caste and religious composition of the population in the different districts of what is at present the state of West Bengal. Since the post 1947 censuses do not give detailed breakdowns by caste, one has necessarily to extrapolate notionally from the 1931 figures. However, the present proportions are not likely to be vastly different, except for a probable increase in the upper-caste Hindu proportions in the districts of 24-Parganas, Nadia, Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar, following partition and emigration from the districts of eastern Bengal. The Muslim proportions in the present districts of Nadia and Malda are also certainly lower, and the Scheduled Caste proportion in Nadia higher than in 1931 (compare with Table 6).

Now, the entry of representatives of the peasantry into the district and local levels of the movements organised by the Congress in Bengal meant, in large part, that people from the Hindu middle castes in the western districts and Muslims in eastern and northern Bengal became part of the Congress organisation. This was particularly true of the districts of south-western Bengal—Midnapore, Hooghly, Bankura, parts of Burdwan and Bhirbhum, and Manbhum, in Bihar—where the Congress organisation struck deep roots in the villages.

If one now looks at Table 2, one will find that the single most important middle caste in south-western Bengal is the Mahisya, resident principally in Midnapore, Howrah, Hooghly and 24-Parganas. Apart from the Mahisya, the only other numerically significant middle-caste groups in western Bengal are the Sadgop and the Goala, both spread over several districts, and the Kurmi who are mainly concentrated in Purulia district. In the northern districts, a major caste is the Rajbangshi, but they are now listed as a Scheduled Caste. It is apparent, therefore, that the caste composition of the peasantry in West Bengal is such that apart from the local concentrations mentioned above, there are no numerically significant middle-caste groups in many regions of the state. Although groups which could be classified as middle castes in the 1931 census comprised between 20 and 60 per cent of the population in every district, they were greatly fragmented: with the exceptions noted above, none of the other castes numbered more than 3 per cent of the population in any district.¹ It must, of course, be remembered that a significant part of the peasantry in the central and northern areas of West Bengal is Muslim and fall outside the realm of our discussion.²

The Scheduled Castes also tend to be fragmented as shown in Table 3. The Namasudras were the largest and politically most organised SC group in undivided Bengal. They were mainly concentrated in the east Bengal districts and were organised under the Scheduled Caste Federation which had links with Ambedkar. After Partition, some migrated to India, a large bulk after the riots of 1954 and another wave in 1977. Some have settled in the border districts of West Bengal—24 Parganas and Nadia. They form the largest part of those rehabilitated in Dandakaranya and the Andaman Islands. But the majority are still in Bangladesh.

The various movements launched by the Congress in different parts of south-western Bengal in the period of the national movement, and the nature and functioning of the Congress organisation in the region, have been studied in great detail by Hitesranjan Sanyal.³ His studies show that the Congress was able to draw considerable support in these areas from different sections of the owner-peasantry. The leadership at local, and later district, levels were in the hands of the substantial peasantry, many of whom were intermediate tenure-holders as well. But the range and depth of popular support, especially from the lower peasantry and sharecroppers, were not unrelated to the fact that such a large proportion of peasants in Midnapore, and even larger proportions in the subdivisions of Contai and Tamluk where these movements were particularly strong, belonged to the Mahisya caste. Mahisyas as a caste were not restricted only to peasants with large holdings but included very large numbers of small peasants and sharecroppers. The social and political authority of many local Congress leaders in Contai and Tamluk derived in large measure from their caste; the Mahisyas, in fact, and a remarkable experience of caste mobilisation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, led by their caste associations, on various educational, religious and other programmes of social upliftment. From the 1920s, the organised Congress movement became for many people in the region the successor to those earlier movements of mass mobilisation on social issues.

Although caste was an important element in the success of the Congress leadership in Midnapore in rallying such remarkably large and durable support, there is little evidence of caste conflict within the Congress organisation in Midnapore. There was admittedly one area of conflict between the district leaders of Midnapore and the provincial leadership of the Congress in Calcutta in the period following the death of C. R. Das in 1925, and caste was often an overt factor in the general manner of contempt and derision with which Midnapore leaders like Birendranath Sasmal, or his associate Basanta Kumar Das, were treated by Calcutta politicians. But this was very much a conflict between a metropolitan political aristocracy and the provincial *hot polloi*. This did not mean a conflict between upper and middle castes in the Midnapore Congress where the ranks of both leadership and followers contained numerous members from the upper castes. When the conflicts did arise in the Midnapore organisation, they operated not along caste lines at all, but, at one plane, on issues of agrarian relations—tenancy, rent, illegal exactions, interest payments, share of the crop—and at another, on the basis of identification with particular political factions in Calcutta.

In the case of Hooghly or Bankura, Sanyal's studies do not reveal any particular middle-caste concentrations at any level of the leadership although several middle castes were represented. There was a large upper caste component in both districts, but again there was no caste dimension to the conflicts within the district organisation or movement. Here, too, there was the same distance between the provincial and district leaderships, although many of the important district leaders here were themselves upper-caste.

In Burdwan, too, the Congress agitation in rural areas led to the

emergence of a new district leadership from among the more substantial *raiya* peasantry. In this district, an important part of this leadership came from the Aguri (Ugra) Kshatriya caste—a middle-caste group not very numerous (they totalled a mere 68,000 in the entire province in 1931, of whom major section was in Burdwan) but counting among its ranks many of the more prosperous owner-peasants in Burdwan. In Manbhum in Bihar, the core leadership of the Congress organisation was composed of immigrant upper-caste *bhadralok*, but the movement spread rapidly among the predominately Kurmi-Mahato *raiya* peasantry and produced, from within this caste, the major part of the second-rank leadership.

Having made this brief summary of the story of the entry of the different middle castes into the arena of organised politics in Bengal, let us turn to take stock of the overall structure of this politics on the eve of independence and partition. The provincial leadership of the Congress in Bengal had always been faction-ridden, the alignments changing frequently and with amazing flexibility, but caste was never a factor in this somewhat sordid game. Indeed, the entire provincial leadership of the Bengal Congress including all its factions was until 1947 a citadel of *bhadralok* politicians, almost wholly upper-caste, with strong support from the upper-caste *bhadralok*-dominated District Congress Committees of eastern and northern Bengal. This was a leadership which, in terms of the specific interests shaping its political activities, was very much a representative of “middle class” interests in Bengal—protection of rentier landed property, preservation of educational privileges, jobs, municipal administration and, of course, “nationalism”. With the exit in the late 1920s of the major part of the Muslim political leadership in Bengal from the fold of the Congress, the Congress Committees in the districts of eastern and northern Bengal were left entirely in the hands of the upper-caste Hindu landlords and professionals, with the former revolutionary groups supplying most of the full-time organising cadres. It is on this support that the various factions of the provincial leadership in Calcutta depended. In the districts of Western Bengal, where the Congress retained its organisational hold over political movements in the countryside, the district leadership contained many representatives of the middle-caste owner-peasantry—in districts like Midnapore. they were clearly the dominant section—but group alignments within districts were not along caste lines. On the other hand, although different factions there aligned with contending groups in the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, district leaders of Western Bengal on the whole had little influence on provincial Congress politics.

If we leave aside the distinctly Muslim parties, of the various organisations which had come up in Bengal during this period and which were to play an important role in the later politics of West Bengal, the Communist and other left parties deserve mention. The leadership of these parties was, again, predominantly from among the literati, the middle-class *bhadralok*. Indeed, a historic development in the evolution of society and polity in West Bengal was the near complete collapse of the *zamindari* form of landownership by the early 1930s. A new generation of *bhadralok* youth, predominantly urban in cultural outlook and shorn of the former ties binding the class to the fragmentary remnants

of landed property, now sought to forge new links with the masses in more radical programmes of agrarian reform and a new vanguardism in political organisation. Their success in launching effective movements were only local, limited to certain areas in western and northern Bengal. But in Midnapore, Burdwan, Hooghly and 24 Parganas, and in Dinajpur, Rangpur and Mymensingh in the north and north-east, Communist workers succeeded in setting up organised movements of the entire tenantry against landlordism and excessive state revenues and, more specifically, of sharecroppers on the demand of a more favourable share of the crop. This latter movement reached its peak during the Tebhaga agitations of 1946-49. In terms of caste, these organisations, whether inside the broader platform of the Congress or outside it, contained the full complement of castes, with the upper-caste intelligentsia in leadership positions at different levels, and various middle and lower castes among both leadership and rank-and-file in the local areas. In particular, since these movements laid greater emphasis than the official Congress machinery on organising the small, and to some extent, the landless peasants, they contained a greater representation of the Scheduled Castes, especially of the Rajbangshi in the northern districts and the Paundra Kshatriya in 24-Parganas.

The partition of Bengal in 1947 meant a massive reorganisation of the entire Congress set-up. With the powerful Congress Committees of what were now the districts of East Pakistan out of the picture, the erstwhile dominance of Calcutta's political elite came under immediate challenge. Now, it was the District Committees of Hooghly, Midnapore or Burdwan which held the cards, and after a period of intense faction-fighting in the period 1947-49, a new order and a new equilibrium of forces was established at the initiative of the Hooghly group, led by master-tactician Atulya Ghosh. Indeed, Atulya Ghosh's West Bengal Congress was a classic example of the ruling party's vote-getting machine. The capture of the provincial citadel by district committees very much under the control of representatives of the richer peasantry smarting under repeated experience of slight and humiliation, could have taken the form of an assault on the upper-caste *bhadralok*. It did not. Indeed, the co-option of Bidhan Chandra Roy as Chief Minister and the reorganisation of the Congress under Atulya Ghosh were a recognition of the indispensability of urban *bhadralok* support for a party of order which had to hold power by electoral success. And with the population of Calcutta and its suburbs swelling with the massive influx of uprooted refugees from East Pakistan, it was soon apparent that the urban *bhadralok* would become indispensable even for parties of radical change.

This indeed is the most crucial—perhaps unique—feature of the social structure in West Bengal which goes a long way in explaining the absence of caste articulation of organised political demands. For since at least the 1920s, and particularly after partition, the upper-caste *bhadralok* have comprised the bulk of the urban Bengali population in and around Calcutta who have no remaining ties of material interest with the land. Coupled with the long-standing tradition of the cultural and political domination of the city over the entire society and polity, this has meant that major political conflicts relating to rights over land, its cultivation and its produce, have never been directed against the upper castes. Whether it has been a question of landlord versus tenant, or

jotdar versus sharecropper, or the fixing of procurement prices for foodgrains, the highly vocal and articulate *bhadralok* intelligentsia have judged the issues not as insiders in a struggle between contending agrarian parties, sharing the modes and categories of thought developed over centuries of collective communal allocation of rights and entitlements relating to the use of land and associated economic activities. Rather, the *bhadralok* have viewed such questions from a distance, from the perspective of urban consumers of agricultural products, and issues of agrarian relations, land reforms, food prices—which form the bread and butter of state politics under the Indian Constitution—have been seen in terms of much more “objective” categories: landlord, rich peasant, middle peasant, small peasant, agricultural labourer, distress sales, terms of trade between agriculture and industry, etc. etc. etc. These are the terms in which the debates have been conducted in the political arena, in party conclaves and mass meetings, and in the media, and when battle lines have been drawn, the upper-caste intelligentsia were to be found in leading roles in every contending party—the ruling party and the party of the opposition, parties of *status quo* and parties of change.

It is not as though landlords and rich peasants are politically inactive or inarticulate in West Bengal. Far from it. And the experiment with intensive agricultural production has had its usual socio-political consequences in the growth of a substantial landowning section actively interested in state patronage of agricultural production and marketing. But unlike most other parts of the country, West Bengal does not have a distinct and separately organised political articulation of the so-called *kulak* interest. The only attempt of this kind was the ill-fated Bangla Congress, born out of a split in the ranks of the Congress in 1965, but blown to maturity in the period of the massive food crisis in 1966 and the Government's policy of compulsory procurement and rigid restrictions on the movement of foodgrains. The Bangla Congress was clearly a party of the *jotdar*-rich peasants of south-western Bengal. After the brief flush of success during the widespread discontent and disapproval of the Congress in the 1967 elections, the Bangla Congress died a quick death. The rise and fall of this party clearly showed the electoral nonviability of a distinctly *kulak* party vying for provincial power.

The extension of adult franchise and the spread of organised politics among the peasant masses has not, therefore, led in West Bengal to an assault on entrenched upper-caste power by the numerically dominant middle castes. For upper-caste power is not localised or easily identifiable; it is itself fragmented differentiated and driven by the full range of political divisions in the state. On the other hand, the absence of caste articulation of political demands does not mean that caste authority or caste linkages have not proved useful to various political parties as instruments of gathering electoral support in the relatively unmobilised areas. But the considerable fragmentation among the middle castes, and the overall dominance of modes of culture and thought of the urban intelligentsia have prevented any successful aggregation of caste interests in the state election scene.

Besides, it is undoubtedly true that the relative success of the Left parties, and even more generally of a “radical” or “left-leaning” ideology, is an

important indicator of the differences of West Bengal politics from the pattern in most other parts of India. Thus far the Left parties have generally operated on the basis of programmatic identity of interests between the urban middle class and the middle and small cultivators, generally on the issues of security of tenure, more favourable terms of rent and interests, ensuring a steady supply of foodgrains at low prices through an effective public distribution system. Vigorous organisation of the landless agricultural labourers has not been seriously attempted. And generally speaking, most Left parties in West Bengal have on the whole avoided, except in isolated instances, a direct confrontation with landlords or rich peasants. But in a situation of cautious and gradual change based very much on parliamentary premises, West Bengal has not witnessed the phenomenon of politically aggressive landlordism, articulated in the idioms of caste superiority and power, which has been seen so often in recent years in Haryana or Uttar Pradesh or Bihar or Tamil Nadu.

Of course, there is the other world of collective social thinking and practice little touched by the orderly process of organised party politics. This is the apparently uninstitutionalised world of what may be called politics among the people. The ordering principles there are not those of individual rights and citizenship or of organised articulation and aggregation of interests. In fact, the principles of representative government are quite alien to this world. The norms and beliefs by which social relations there are thought of and acted upon are based upon the notion of a community, a prior collective authority from which all other rights and entitlements flow. And there, caste becomes a fundamental organising principle in terms of which the social division of labour is conceived. Economic relations have, of course, undergone many changes, particularly in the last hundred years or so, but in ideological terms the categories of caste have continued to provide many of the basic signifying terms through which collective identities and social relations are still perceived. These have, in most other parts of India, even become the most important categories for the organisation of collective interest. We have, on the other hand, seen why this has not happened in the sphere of organised politics in West Bengal. But this does not necessarily imply that these categories and modes of thought have been eliminated from popular consciousness.

Much more research needs to be done into the elements constituting popular political ideology at the level of the rural communities in Bengal before we can make more definite statements about it. The following comments are, therefore, not only speculative but also entirely impressionistic. But it does appear that while a process of differentiation within the peasantry, the spread of organised political agitations on class questions and electoral mobilisation have together tended to erode and perhaps break down the bases of any earlier notion of the community as consisting of an entire village, this is often replaced by the idea of a truncated or fragmented community, comprising perhaps of a strata of the peasantry or of a caste, but possessing many of the ideological characteristics of collective solidarity and identity of a community. In parts of India where organised party politics links together these truncated peasant communities into larger political movements in terms of caste, we can immediately perceive the

impact of caste on organised politics. But where, for various reasons, the linkages with the structure of organised politics do not take the form of caste, we may be mistaken in concluding that caste, or similar truncated communal loyalties, have disappeared from the political consciousness of the people. For it is quite possible for a strata of the peasantry to be mobilised politically for struggle against its economic exploiters, and for it to subscribe to an organised political movement articulated and conducted in the more objective terms of class struggle, and yet to perceive its own identity as a collective group struggling against common exploiters defined in terms of caste or religion or such other "communal" notions. A recent study of electoral mobilisation in some Midnapore villages⁵ has shown, for instance, that whereas the upper and middle sections of the peasantry in a village would be divided in their support to various parties, their decision being the result of elaborate calculations of expected gains and losses, the lowest strata in any particular village would tend *en bloc* to support a single candidate, usually from one of the Left parties. The same study has also shown "spontaneous, self-generated mobilisation" during an election campaign among the poorest sections of the peasantry, belonging mainly to the Scheduled Castes and, in particular, the tribes. But if this hypothesis is correct, then there would also remain the possibility of sudden shifts in the support given by these "communities" to particular political parties, since this support is more the result of a particular choice of linkage with the structure of organised politics of a group identifying itself as an exploited peasant community rather than its absorption into that organised structure as a group conscious of itself as constituting part of a class. In that case, given appropriate conditions in the arena of organised politics, there can, even in West Bengal today, be no *a priori* ruling out the possibility of political mobilisations based on appeals to caste or tribal or religious loyalties.

The widespread electoral support for the Left parties among the poorer sections of the peasantry, whether owners or landless, have derived in large part from the performance of the three governments in West Bengal in which the Left parties have participated. The movements conducted by these parties among the poor and landless have, since the mid-1960s, been largely geared towards the mobilisation of electoral support based on the promise of beneficial administrative action if the party was elected to power. It should not, therefore, be surprising if it is found that peasant consciousness still regards the state and the various organisations or personalities vying for state power as external entities which are either benevolent or malicious, and accordingly worthy of veneration or rebellion, but never as the products of a set of social relations of power and authority of which it is itself a part. Since the efforts of the Left parties have been confined largely to the question of the choice of appropriate *representatives*, and not so much to the task of conscious organisation to *overthrow* existing relations of power, the evidence of support to the Left does not necessarily reflect a corresponding demolition of the structures of false consciousness among the people. The contrasts of West Bengal politics with the rest of India are, it would seem, due more to the strikingly different role in the state's organised politics of a radicalised middle-class leadership; the contrasts do not run to the level of popular ideology or consciousness.

Table 1
Caste and Religious Divisions, 1931
 (as percentages of total district population)

	<i>Upper-caste Hindus</i>	<i>Middle-caste Hindus</i>	<i>Depressed Classes</i>	<i>Tribes</i>	<i>Muslims</i>	<i>Other Religions</i>
Burdwan	9.81	29.07	34.50	7.69	18.56	0.37
Birbhum	6.44	22.45	36.50	7.82	26.69	0.10
Bankura	11.29	39.70	31.81	12.51	4.59	0.10
Manbhum	7.07	47.50	22.42	16.29	6.01	0.71
Midnapore	6.31	58.17	19.15	8.54	7.59	0.24
Hooghly	10.33	41.84	27.00	4.56	16.17	0.10
Howrah	10.48	46.58	20.86	0.42	21.27	0.39
24-Parganas	6.04	27.61	29.95	1.97	33.65	0.78
Nadia	4.84	21.99	10.19	0.54	61.77	0.67
Murshidabad	3.79	25.31	13.24	2.00	55.56	0.10
Malda	1.41	25.84	10.21	8.25	54.28	0.01
Dinajpur	1.32	32.78	5.76	9.48	50.51	0.15
Jalpaiguri	1.80	43.82	4.07	22.50	23.99	0.88 (+2.94)
Darjeeling	3.12	14.50	2.38	14.51	2.63	13.62 (+49.24)
Cooch Behar	1.87	59.48	2.74	—	35.33	0.58

[Source : Computed from *Census of India*, 1931, Vol. V (Bengal and Sikkim) and Vol. VII (Bihar & Orissa)].

Notes 1 : Compared with the present districts of West Bengal, 24-Parganas in this table excludes the Bongaon sub-division then in Jessore district; Nadia includes Kushtia sub-division (now in Bangladesh). Dinajpur includes Dinajpur sub-division (now in Bangladesh) and excludes part of Purnea district in Bihar which were later transferred to West Dinajpur district in West Bengal; Cooch Behar was then a princely state outside British India; Manbhum was in Bihar of which the Purulia sub-division was transferred to West Bengal to form the present Purulia district.

2 : The figures for Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling excludes 2.94% and 49.24, respectively, of the population who were listed as Nepali Hindus the caste distinctions among whom cannot be meaningfully incorporated into this discussion of the Bengali caste structure

Table 2**The Principal Middle Castes, 1931**

(as percentages of total district population)

Burdwan	: Sadgop 6.31, Goala 4.34, Kalu/Teli 2.08.
Birbhum	: Sadgop 8.20, Kalu/Teli 2.38.
Bankura	: Goala 5.82, Tili 4.93, Sadgop 3.95, Kalu/Teli 2.79; <i>Khaira</i> 2.42, Tanti 2.21, Kamar 1.93, Kurmi 1.86, Mahisya 1.82.
Manbhum	: Kurmi 17.84, Kumhar 3.15, Teli 2.68, Goala 2.26, Kamar 1.95.
Midnapore	: Mahisya 31.56, Sadgop 3.92, Kurmi 3.06, Tanti 3.03, Baishnab 2.20, Raju 1.96.
Hooghly	: Mahisya 15.74, Sadgop 4.89, Goala 3.89, Tanti 2.50, Tili 1.98.
Howrah	: Mahisya 24.92, Goala 2.51, Sadgop 1.92.
24 Parganas	: Mahisya 12.14, Goala 2.62.
Nadia	: Mahisya 6.49, Goala 3.56.
Murshidabad	: Mahisya 5.48, Sadgop 3.82, Goala 2.06.
Malda	: <i>Rajbangshi</i> 3.99.
Dinajpur	: <i>Rajbangshi</i> 20.53.
Jalpaiguri	: <i>Rajbangshi</i> 33.68.
Darjeeling	: <i>Rajbangshi</i> 8.44.
Cooch Behar	: <i>Rajbangshi</i> 53.56.

[Source : Computed from *Census of India, 1931*, Vols. V and VII].

Note : The *Khaira* and *Rajbangshi* castes were not included among the "Depressed Classes" in the 1931 Census. Both are now listed as Scheduled Castes in West Bengal.

Table 3

The Principal "Depressed Classes", 1931
(as percentages of total district population)

Burdwan	: Bagdi 11.75, Bauri 7.86, Muchi 4.05, Dom 2.22.
Birbhum	: Bagdi 9.24, Muchi 4.79, Mal 4.32, Bauri 3.90, Dom 3.83, Hari 2.36.
Bankura	: Bauri 10.74, Bagdi 8.07, Lohar 2.30, Sunri 2.26.
Manbhum	: Bauri 6.69.
Midnapore	: Bagdi 5.49.
Hooghly	: Bagdi 14.02, Bauri 2.33.
Howrah	: Bagdi 6.99.
24 Parganas	: Pod (Paundra Kshatriya) 14.71, Bagdi 3.68, Kaora 2.28.
Nadia	: Bagdi 2.62.
Murshidabad	: Bagdi 2.94.

[Source : Computed from *Census of India*, 1931, Vols. V and VII.]

Table 4

The Principal Tribes, 1931
(as percentages of total district population)

Burdwan	: Santal 4.10.
Bankura	: Santal 6.07.
Manbhum	: Santal 15.59, Bhumij 5.74.
Midnapore	: Santal 3.05.
Hooghly	: Santal 2.71.
Dinajpur	: Santal 4.43.
Jalpaiguri	: Oraon 9.04, Munda 3.72.
Malda	: Santal 3.64.

[Source : Computed from *Census of India*, 1931, Vols. V and VII.]

Table 5
Literacy and Occupation of Selected Castes, 1931
 (as percentage of total population of the caste in Bengal)

	<i>Literate</i>	<i>Agriculture</i>	<i>Industry</i>	<i>Higher Professions</i>
Brahman	37.28	15.38	4.50	30.76
Baidya	51.74	6.04	1.85	49.40
Kayastha	32.90	20.03	5.16	22.42
Goala	10.17	37.49	7.28	5.42
Kamar	14.91	21.81	56.11	5.32
Bagdi	1.92	81.74	5.03	1.17
Bauri	0.77	65.94	4.07	0.78

[Source : Nirmal Kumar Bose, *Hindu Samaj Garan* (Calcutta : Visvabharati, 1949), now available in English as *The Structure of Hindu Society*, tr. Andre Beteille (Delhi : Orient Longman, 1975).]

Table 6
Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 1971
 (as percentage of total district population)

	<i>Scheduled Castes</i>	<i>Scheduled Tribes</i>
Burdwan	24.51	5.84
Birbhum	30.00	7.05
Bankura	28.22	10.28
Purulia	15.00	19.58
Midnapore	13.57	8.04
Hooghly	19.08	3.48
Howrah	12.31	0.14
24-Parganas	22.61	1.62
Nadia	21.32	1.43
Murshidabad	12.16	1.32
Malda	16.48	8.11
West Dinajpur	23.10	11.90
Jalpaiguri	34.02	23.49
Darjeeling	12.57	13.89
Cooch Behar	47.02	0.75

[Source ; Computed from *Census of India, 1971, Series I, Part IIA (ii).*]

Reference

1. If one compares this with the situation in other north Indian states, one finds that while the overall caste structure is even more fragmented in most north Indian districts, there being sometimes more than 25 castes in a district each having more than 1% of the district population. nevertheless, there are large contiguous regions where one or the other middle or lower caste—Jat, Rajput, Ahir, Goala, Chamar—is clearly dominant. Secondly, Punjab, and to some extent western Uttar Pradesh, have much more homogeneous caste structures over contiguous groups of villages than in Bengal where there are great variations in the caste structures of even neighbouring villages. See Joseph E. Schwartzberg, "Caste Regions of the North Indian Plains" in Milton Singer and Bernard S. Cohn, eds., *Structure and Change in Indian Society* (Chicago : Aldine, 1968), pp. 81-113.
2. Muslim conversion has a great deal to do with the rather unique caste structure in Bengal, because a very substantial bulk of the peasantry, who would otherwise have formed the large middle castes, became Muslim. In many respects, both before and after Partition, the muslim landowning peasantry in both halves of Bengal have behaved much like the dominant peasant middle castes in other parts of India, but because of religious 'communalism' this has taken completely different ideological and organisational forms in undivided and later divided Bengal, especially in terms of the hold of the substantial landed peasantry over the muslim small and landless in eastern Bengal.
3. Hitesranjan Sanyal, "Congress Movements in the Villages of Eastern Midnapore, 1921-1931", *Asie du Sud : Traditions et Changements* (Paris, 1979), pp. 169-178; "Arambager Jatiatabadi Andolan" *Anyar Artha*, 6 (Sep—Oct. 1974), pp. 6-23 and 7 (Nov—Dec., 1974), pp. 1-15; "Bankura Jelay Jatiatabadi Andolan" *Anyar Artha*, 10 (Jan—Feb, 1977), pp. 1-21.
4. For discussion of some aspects of this process as evidenced by the prolonged Hindu-Muslim conflict in rural Bengal, see Partha Chatterjee, "Agrarian Relations and Communalism in Bengal, 1926-1935" in Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies : Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi : Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
5. Partha N. Mukherji, Prafulla Chakrabarti, Manatendu Chattopadhyay and Anjan Ghosh, "Left Extremism and Electoral Politics : Naxalite Participation in Elections", unpublished report, ICSSR, New Delhi (July 1979).

Caste and Polity in Bihar

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This elementary essay deals with caste—a theme which recurs frequently in any discussion on Bihar. This essay should be read with one condition in mind. No attempt has been made here to produce any new theory on caste. This is not because of any version to theory. But because any meaningful formulation on caste system as we find in Bihar today needs more intensive work on economic, political and social life of Bihar, which is beyond the scope of this paper. Here we limit ourselves on three aspects : a) caste and caste sabhas—their history; (b) caste and political groupings and (c) caste and class struggles in the present day rural Bihar.

Our main emphasis has been to record the fact. But facts as such have no value. The facts assume some importance only within a definitive theoretical frame. The caste system as we find them in Bihar operate in the realm of consciousness mainly. It enables the present economically dominant classes to consolidate their social and political positions over their caste brethren. And this is reciprocated by the lower caste people in organising on caste lines to fight against their upper caste landowners. This readoption of a basic category of an earlier mode for use in the social system is the unique use of the caste system as one finds the present day in Bihar. The purpose of this paper is to lay bare these facts as prelude to further work.

Distribution of Castes

Excluding some areas in the north-eastern corner (where there are a large number of Muslim families) and parts of Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas (the land of the tribals), in all other parts Hindus account for more than ninety per cent of population. But this population is not homogeneous. For apart from economic groups this Hindu population is also divided in more than a hundred castes, a traditional division which still remains highly effective.

There are four upper castes in Bihar—Brahmin, Bhumihar, Rajput and Kayastha. But they are spread all over the state. A fifth of all the Brahmins in Bihar come from Darbhanga.¹ The Brahmins in Bihar are divided in two sects—Kanujia and Maithil. The two groups behave as two different castes in

religious matters as well as in politics. A third of all the Rajputs in Bihar are found mainly in the two Bhojpuri speaking districts—Shahabad and Saran. They are maritally and culturally related to the Rajputs of Eastern U.P. Nearly a half of the total Bhumihar population is found in the districts of Patna, Gaya and Monghyr, the old 'Magadha' region. The characteristics of the upper castes in Bihar may be described as : (a) they are land-based except the Kayasthas who are numerically less important; (b) each of these caste represent different cultural stocks. It is believed that they never agree in politics. In fact, the caste-politics in Bihar has been riddled with the rivalries of four uppercaste.

There are more than hundred backward castes—Yadavas, Kurmis and Koiris being the numerically superior. Together, these three castes account for about a half of the total backward caste population. These castes are more or less evenly distributed all over the state. Among the Scheduled Castes, Chamar, Dusadh and Mushars are numerically important. All the scheduled castes together account for 14 per cent of the state population.² "The middle castes were predominantly tenants of pre-independence days. After the abolition of zamindari, a section of them became owners of substantial land. The others became middle or poor peasants, some others were pushed down to become agricultural labourers. The scheduled castes were reduced to poor peasants and agricultural labourers".

As in the other parts of the country, in Bihar too social reform movements were initiated by Arya Samaj etc., by the end of the last century. In Bihar the units of mobilisation were the castes, not the villages or the regions. No example of reform movements are recorded in Bihar in which the different castes in one region participated together.

The Kayasthas, the caste of writers, were the ones to receive English-education first. The reform movement on the issues like overseas travel, female literacy, widow marriage etc. began first among the Kayasthas (Prasad, 1957) and then among other castes. For a long time the Kayastha elite led Bihar (Roy, 1970). It included the social reform—in particular sanction of overseas travel movement—in the first decade, the separation of Bihar from Bengal in the second decade, and the leadership of the Congress party in Bihar in the third decade of this century. Other castes followed and later wrestled the hegemony from the Kayasthas. Although not exactly similar, 'Sanskritisation' within the lower castes were also a wide phenomenon in Bihar—particularly since the twenties. There were attempts at social reforms on various questions e.g. one among the Dusadhas to do away with their infamous 'criminal caste' introduction (O'Malley, 1932:101).

Simultaneously with these reform attempts, the caste question also came into prominence because of certain government policies. For example, when the Kurmis were declared as 'criminal castes' and were prevented from joining the police and the army in 1894, it led to agitations in Lucknow, U.P. and from there to the formation of the All India Kurmi Mahasabha, which was subsequently extended to Bihar (Verma, 1976). The major thrust came in 1901 through the Census Operations. Mitra has rightly put the point as :

'In 1901 Risley attempted a list of Castes according to their rank in society, incidentally sowing the dragon's tooth of 'depressed' and

'scheduled' tribes and castes... Risley failed but left a most troublesome legacy and a vast field of political and social manoeuvring.... Every Census thereafter provoked a pestiferous deluge of representations, adorned with highly hypothetical histories, asking for recognition of some alleged fact or hypothesis or demanding withdrawal of similar hypothesis from other castes..." (Mitra; 1951:1).

In Bihar Bhumihars and Kayasthas were considered *Varna* Vaishshya in the early Censuses, although by their strong economic positions they enjoyed as much prestige as Brahmins or Rajputs (considered *Varna* Kshatriya). The Kayasthas and... Bhumihars began agitating for the upliftment of their caste status. The drive for attaining a higher status was not confined to writing petitions to the government. Socially well-established Bhumihars and Kayasthas like Dr. Sachchidananda Sinha and Sir Ganesh Dutt Singh took active interests in encouraging the youth in their own castes to take up English education. The separation of Bihar offered new scopes of social occupations. Nawarang Rai, a Sanskrit scholar and a Bhumihar youth, scanned the Sanskrit texts to prove that Bhumihars were actually Brahmins by *Varna*. Later Nawrang Rai became famous as Swami Sahajanand Saraswati. The fact that the Kayasthas and the Bhumihars were once considered as belonging to lower castes led to the rise of modern caste *sabhas* among them. These two among the four upper castes of Bihar have the highest degree of organised caste functions even today.

The Kayasthas and the Bhumihars were not alone. Many other castes demanded higher status. The formation of caste *sabhas* among the lower castes became a rule. In 1931 Census the mode of functioning of these *sabhas* were noted as :

—In most cases the procedure is more or less uniform. A new name is selected for the caste, its members are to adopt the sacred thread and various resolutions are passed dealing in such questions as food and drink, the abandonment of 'degrading' occupations, raising the age of marriage etc." (Census of India, 1931).

Such agitations and formations of caste *Sabhas* became important among the three major tenant castes—Yadavas, Kurmis, and Koiris. In the nineteen-twenties, in most areas of Gangetic Bihar there were several occurrences of social reform movements among these castes. The root lay in the deterioration of zamindar-tenant relationship. (Jha 1977). The reforms like wearing the sacred threads, adopting upper caste titles and refusing to do customary *pranams* to the upper caste, actually had the intention of defying the zamindars. The zamindars did not take this easily. The whole the twenties evidenced several bloody clashes fought on this issue between the Rajput and Bhumihar landlords on the one side and their Yadava-Kurmi tenants on the other side. In 1928 Swami Sahajananda formed the Kisan Sabha. Since then the caste movement of the tenantry took a new turn. Under the aegis of the Kisan Sabha the 'Sanskritisation' process developed to demand the abolition of the zamindari system (Sengupta, forthcoming). Outside the influence of Kisan Sabha the backward caste movement developed into political organisations like 'Triveni Sangh', later 'Backward Caste Federation', then provided the basis for the spread of Socialist Party after the independence, and finally through the disillusionment about the role of the caste organisation prepared the ground for

the spread of Naxalism (Mukherjee, 1981). The process of development has not been unipolar. From an initial unified position every caste organisation developed into radical and the reactionary streams. Along with Swami Sahajanand there were Sir Ganesh Dutt Singh in Bhumihar Caste movement who ended up as one of the chief spokesmen of the landlords' interests in the Bihar Provincial Council. The movement of the tenants in the twenties has also given rise to the present day elite-based agitations among the "backwards" under Karpoori Thakur's rule.

Traditionally, as religious phenomena, the operation of castes were confined to small regions. The Census and the other Government policies brought the different castes of several regions into certain common processes and provided a comparative framework. The old local concepts responded to those and were modified in order to be able to function within this wider perspective. The castes of today are not exactly the same as those of yesterday. In the political area those are broader phenomena than the religious ones. The Awadhis of Patna, the Dhanuks of North Bihar and the Mahatos of Chotanagpur are distinct castes separated by geographical distances. Even today, in religious, marital and traditional social functions they maintain distinction. But in politics they regard themselves as a single caste named 'Kurmi', the unity being legitimised by sanctions given in the Kurmi Mahasabhas. In fact the integration is more extensive to include other castes e.g. Marathas or Kunbis from wider geographic regions, some of whom were not even aware of one another in the past.³ The other type of caste alignment is the emergence of 'backwards', or 'Harijans' as groups. These concepts are far removed from traditional concepts about castes.

Caste and Political Groupings

The Kayasthas were the first to accept English education in Bihar. Their first articulation as caste groups was against the Bengalis, who had monopolized the white-collar jobs, which the Kayasthas wanted. The Kayastha elite had their leader in Sachchidananda Sinha, "the maker of modern Bihar", and later their natural choice was Rajendra Prasad, the bright student. Rajendra Prasad was the natural choice of a leader among the Bihari students too, and he established Bihari students' Association in 1908, the first student organisation in the whole of India—which has successfully made most of the prominent Congress leaders in Bihar in the 'twenties. (Prasad, 1957)

However, other castes also took to English education. Soon the Bhumihars and Rajputs, the two numerically strong, economically better-off upper castes formed the major contingents in the Congress Party although Rajendra Prasad could maintain his position as the oldest Congressman, mainly because of his role as the founder of the Party in Bihar and as close associate of Gandhiji. But interesting developments occurred within the backward castes. As the Kisan Sabha championed the tenant cause and Congress often identified itself with the interest of the Zamindars, a substantial section, if not the major section, of backward castes rallied behind the Kisan Sabha. The separation was complete when the Kisan Sabha broke away from Congress Party in 1938. Although Kisan Sabha had a large number of Bhumihars in its leadership it could remain

unscathed from caste-politics. (Hauser, 1961). However, attempts were made to form backward caste organisations. The Triveni Sangha was particularly active in Shahabad, where it tried to unite major backward castes such as Yadavas, Kurmis and Koiris out of the influence of both Kisan Sabha and Congress (Mukherjee, 1981). In the forties the Sangha merged with the Congress.

However, the more significant development that occurred was with respect to Harijans. Following Poona Pact, 1932, the Congress began working among the Harijans. In Bihar they sponsored such young leaders like Jagjivan Ram from the rank of Harijans. Very soon this effort was turned against the Kisan Sabha, which was posing a great challenge to Congress. Jagjivan Ram formed the *Khet Mazdoor Sabha*, one of the first agricultural labour organisations in the country. This embarrassed the tenants in the Kisan Sabha, many of whom were big tenants employing agricultural labourers.

The Kisan Sabha leaders were trapped in an uneasy situation and leaders like Swami Sahajanand or Rahul Sankritayan were bitter about "setting agricultural labourers against Kisan" (Das and Sengupta). Despite this uneasy situation the caste-differences could not play dominant role in Bihar politics during the Kisan Sabha days. Casteism practised by the Congress or the Triveni Sangh did not make much impact on tenant-zamindar struggle.

For a long time the Congress had retained its championship of the cause of the Harijans by the developmental programme taken up in the fifties. The Kisan Sabha was torn between factions and finally lost its position. The peasantry turned apathetic to politics and the political process was confined mostly to cliques in Congress, grouping in State Assembly and mobilisation for Elections in the name of castes.

The caste alignment and the concomitant political equation that was witnessed in Bihar earlier, remained intact even after the attainment of independence. In early twenties there was a proliferation of caste sabhas. These caste organizations have lost their earlier significance. These caste groups now reside within the Congress. In fact, the Congress has turned out to be a confederation of various caste groups.

There were two important factions inside Congress in the fifties. On the apex of the Bhumihar faction was Dr. S.K. Sinha, the Chief Minister, while the Kayastha-Rajput faction was led by Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Dr. A.N. Sinha. The politics of Congress in Bihar revolved round individuals and the permutation combination of caste and its changing alliances. Acharya Narendra Dev remarked that Congress leaders seldom bother to discuss the question of Congress ideology or programme in A.I.C.C. entrusting Rajendra Prasad to take care of it (Mishra).

Of the two faction leaders, Dr. A.N. Sinha staunchly supported the landlord interest. Any Kisan Sabha movement was anathema to him. This to some extent stemmed from his dislike for the Bhumihars, who were mostly leaders of the Kisan Sabha, like Sahajanand Saraswati, Karyanand Sharma, Rahul Sankritayan, and Ramanand Mishra. Secondly, abolition of Zamindari would have affected the Rajput landlord interests which he represented. On the other

hand Dr. S.K. Sinha represented the interest of big peasants rather than big zamindars. When the notorious landlord of Barahaiya, Baijnath Singh alias 'Hitler' was arrested on charge of killing some batadars, he refused to do anything with him. This enraged the castemen of his area, but he refused to budge and Baijnath Singh died behind the bar. Dr. Sinha had started his career under the patronage of Sir Ganesh Dutt Singh, during his brief stint in Kisan Movement, had taken active part in the national movement and was with Pandit Nehru as against Patel in the national politics. This made him more flexible in his approaches to other castes. Instead of basing his support only among his caste he enlisted the support of rich peasants of all castes and assumed the leadership with the promise of Zamindari abolition and other progressive measures. His faction included prominent Rajputs like Sarangdhar Singh and Sardar Harihar Singh and Kayasths like K.B. Sahay and Harnivans Sahay. Most of the backward leaders were with him, like B.C. Patel, Mandal, H.N. Yadav, and Deo Narain Singh. In his effort to broaden his group, L.P. Singh, a Rajput was appointed Chief Secretary and R.C. Prasad a Kayastha, was his own secretary.

On the question of Zamindari abolition the reactions of the two groups were diametrically opposed. Dr. S.K. Sinha and K.B. Sahay stood for abolition of Zamindari. Dr. Sinha felt that for the development of capitalism in agriculture the feudal remnant of Zamindari system needed to be abolished. This would be beneficial to the rich peasants also, which would strengthen his group. K.B. Sahay, who permanently unsettled permanent settlement (Das and Sengupta), felt that without breaking the power of the landowning class and banishing their hold from society and politics, it would be difficult for their group to succeed in politics. In spite of vociferous opposition by Sardar Patel the patron of the Rajput-Kayastha axis, who said that Zamindari abolition tantamounts to public loot, and in spite of all possible effort by Rajendra Prasad to drop K.B. Sahay from the Ministry, the bill of Zamindari abolition was introduced and passed in the five years after its first introduction to the assembly. Drama was added to the whole episode when a truck tried to run over K.B. Sahay and he entered the assembly premises in bandaged head to introduce the bill. There was a virtual deluge of vilification campaign against K.B. Sahay. The entire machination to thwart the zamindari abolition bill and Dr A.N. Sinha's tacit support.

By 1952, with the death of Sardar Patel and elevation of Rajendra Prasad as Union President, Dr. S.K. Sinha held complete sway over Bihar Congress politics. He included one of his blood relations Mahesh Pd. Sinha in his cabinet, ironically at the insistence of Dr. A. N. Sinha. This brought fissures in his faction. K.B. Sahay saw this development with suspicion. Though second in command in the faction of C.M. his hopes of succeeding him did not seem possible. Though he had defected from Dr. H.N. Sinha's group in late forties when his future seemed dark there, he defected back to A.N. Sinha's group from Dr. S.K. Sinha's because he could not reconcile to M.P. Sinha's proximity with C.M. Dr. S.K. Sinha, to counter-balance the defection of K.B. Sahay and his group, inducted a number of landlords into Congress and compromised his early radical stand in agriculture. To ensure the support of Darbhanga

Maharaj the biggest Zamindar of India, his nominee Kumar Ganganand Singh was given a berth in the cabinet, even though he was an important leader of the Bihar Landholder's Association, other included were Shyam Nandan Sahay, a Zamindar and former President of Bihar Chamber of Commerce, Rajandhari Singh of Dharhara Estate.

By 1960 Dr. S.K. Sinha had grown quite old and ineffective, with the emergence of M P. Sinha and K.K. Sinha, Deputy Minister of education in his group, the base of his faction was narrowed and the real power had virtually gone into the hands of Bhumihar landlords. They derived their strength from the rank of Bhumihar caste. This led to widespread disenchantment in the ranks of non-Bhumihar supporters of Dr. S.K. Sinha (Mishra).

So after the death of Dr. S.K. Sinha the entire non-Bhumihar group combined to put up B.N. Jha a Brahmin, for leadership of the Congress legislative party. Jha recorded a spectacular victory and M.P. Sinha was defeated. With election of Jha, casteism entered a new phase. He started distributing patronage to Brahmin for the important posts. He thrived on the support of K.B. Sahay and Satyendra Narayan Sinha, the son of Dr. A.N. Sinha. After the death of Dr. A.N. Sinha the Rajput leadership fell on his head. He was commonly known as Chotte Saheb. But Sahay and Sinha soon withdrew their support to Jha over the question of distribution of fishes and loaves of office. Jha tried to counter-act them by inducting the Raja of Ramgarh and the supporters of Jharkhand Party in the Congress. K.B. Sahay's political enmity with Raja of Ramgarh dated back to distant past (Jha, 1972). Jha could not succeed in facing Sahay-Sinha onslaught and was axed during Kamaraj plan.

K.B. Sahay replaced Jha as the Chief Minister of Bihar. The radicalism of Sahay, the hero of Zamindari abolition, was missing. He could not go ahead with any land reform measure; the zeal that he displayed as revenue minister in the Cabinet of S.K. Sinha was not seen again. He depended on S.N. Sinha and M. P. Sinha, two important messiahs, of the Rajput-Bhumihar landlords, for his survival. When Sahay could not erode the influence of Rajput-Bhumihar landlords, he devised a new method to fight them by mobilising the backward castes behind him. One of the outstanding leaders to emerge during this period under his guidance was Ram Lakhan Singh Yadav, the leader of the single largest caste in Bihar the Yadav. Triveni Sangh, the association of Koeri, Kurmi and Yadavas, was revived, which had been first formed in early thirties. Sahay could not succeed in checking the erosion of mass support as the economic crisis increased. In his frustration he took anti-people measures which resulted into massive anti-Congress movement and the ousting of Congress from the power in 1967.

In the fourth General election the Congress was defeated. Though Mahamaya Prasad became Chief Minister of United Front, the monopoly of upper castes was substantially lessened in the politics of Bihar. This is because, after the abolition of Zamindari and the introduction of new technology in agriculture the upper-middle caste emerged as an important factor in the politics of Bihar. The Koeris, Kurmis and Yadavas are efficient agricultural entrepreneurs. They generated the maximum surplus in agriculture. With their newly acquired economic power they started vying for political power (Prasad, 1979). But the

upper middle castes were not moving unitedly. They suspected each other. In 1969, Bindeshwar Prasad Mandal, a rich landlord Yadav of Saharsa district in manipulating some M.L.A's to defect from U.F. Parties to cause the fall of Mahamaya Ministry, asked Satish Prasad Singh a lesser known Koeri leader to head the ministry for a day to facilitate his nomination in the Council for becoming Chief Minister rather than Jagdeo Prasad, a powerful Koeri leader who was self styled "Lenin of Bihar". In the 1967 assembly election Yadavas were the single largest caste in the assembly. The other upper middle caste members in the assemblies were quite sizeable in number. These rich peasants of upper castes were mostly attracted to the Socialist Party of Dr. Lohia and later to the party of Charan Singh. In fact the S.S.P. and later on the Lok Dal became a confederation of backward castes, though it had a number of upper caste leaders. It choose to fight the casteism of super caste by the casteism of backward castes.

The Congress, faced with the possibility of extinction, started extending its base among other castes. It throws a number of backward caste leaders in the forefront like, Daroga Prasad Rai, Bhola Paswan Shastri, Ram Jaipal Singh Yadav and Dharam Vir Sinha.

Until the emergence of Karpoori Thakur after 1977 election and implementation of reservation policy, the backwards were not under single leadership. Karpoori Thakur though belonging to a microscopic minority castes of Nai, assumed the leadership of the entire "backwards" of Bihar and turned other Koeri, Kurmi and Yadav leaders who dominated backward politics into insignificance. The representative of the Nais in the assembly is one, that of Karpoori Thakur. In fact he is the most revered leader among the backwards.

It is interesting that in Bihar the attitude of the non-Congress leaders towards Congress depended on who was the leader. When Dr. S. K. Sinha was Chief Minister, Ramanand Tewari, a Brahmin P. S. P. leader was very critical of him, but during B. N. Jha's leadership he became silent, and Baswan Singh, a Bhumihar P.S.P leader was more critical of Jha than Tewari. After persual of the J.P.Sinha to correspondence in 1957, where J.P.'s advocacy to Dr. S K. Sinha to include Sahay in his cabinet even after his defeat in assembly election, one gets impression that both were indulging in casteism. It is amusing that J.P. who renounced politics, indulged in the internal caste politics of Congress. He was vocal when police firing took place in 1955 in Patna and in 1970's in Bihar, but was silent in 1965-67 when Sahay took repressive measures against the students.

After the rise of Indira Gandhi in Congress and in country, the Brahmins started dominating the scene. L. N. Mishra developed into a close confidant of Indira Gandhi. The support of Maithil Brahmin had always been bedrock of support to Congress and Nehru. By his closeness with Indira he developed a complete grip over the machinery of Bihar Congress.

During the euphoria of J. P. movement, casteism was relegated to some extent in the background. But when Janata came into power, S. N. Sinha emerged as the most powerful leader. To stall his move to become Chief Minister all other castes united behind Karpoori Thakur and the Rajputs were

isolated. Thakur had quite good pull among Bhumihars. After the reservation policy of Karpoori Thakur the entire rank and file of upper caste rallied behind Congress (I) or truncated Janata led by Chandra Shekhar. Surprisingly a number of Bhumihar leaders were with Congress (U), Lok Dal or other parties though rank and file remained violently opposed to this alliance.

In the wake of assembly election more or less the whole of the upper castes are behind Congress (I) and BJP and the backward castes are behind Lok Dal and Congress (U).

The left parties like C. P. I. and C.P.M. are there but they are not a force to reckon with. Casteism is still the dominant factor in the determination of the course of assembly politics in Bihar.

Caste and Class Struggles

The presence of castes is seemingly overwhelming. This poses problems for analysts who were distracted from real issues behind these caste groups and caste ideology. The problem can best be illustrated by an analysis of recent clashes in rural areas of Bihar, which have often been described as "caste conflict". If the statistics of conflicts in rural areas is examined, the incidence of rural violence shows some definite patterns. In the incidences of atrocities in Bajitpur, Khijuria, Bishrampur, Gopalpur, Baniapatti, Chaudadano, the main issues were wage, sharecroppers' rights over their cultivated land, and possession of government distributed land. In Belchi, and to a certain extent, in Bishrampur, fight was against social oppression, including sexual exploitation. These factors were not obvious in other incidents though they were latently there in almost all cases. The caste components of attackers were varied. In Bajitpur, Parasbiga and Pipra, they were Bhumihars, a particularly aggressive landowning upper caste. In Bishrampur, Beniapatti, Pupri, Belchi, Gopalpur, Chaudadano and Pipra, they were Kurmis, a counterpose to Bhumihars among the backward castes. Whether Bhumihars, or Yadavs and Kurmis, they are landlords, who were determined to preserve their land, some part of which are often ill-gotten. In Bishrampur the Kurmi zamindars backed by upper caste landlords fought jointly against the poor Harijan share-croppers when the latter claimed the land they are cultivating. Their victims were Musahar, Chamars, Dusadh, Yadavs and even Brahmins (as in Belchi). They cut across castes. But they have a few common things. They all earn their living as sharecroppers or wage labours. And they are men of poor means.

This is, however, only one though, main aspect of the problem. A few other aspects need to be noted here for fuller understanding of the situation. In Benaipatti in Purnea, Bidni Mahato, the landlord, is also a member of the local co-operatives and has a relation in the SDO's court, which he uses skilfully to defeat any attempt by labourers to seek legal redress. In Belchi in Patna, Mahabir Mahato, the Kurmi leader of the carnage, and Indradeo Chaudhury, an independent Kurmi MLA, who gave political support to him. In Dharampura, the share-croppers faced Ramanuj Acharaya, a priest and landlord, who had his support base among the local Brahmin mukhias and in Jagnarayan Trivedi, a Brahmin MLA who gave political support to the mahant. The local Brahmin landlords

formed a Kisan Mazdoor Sangh under one Srikant Pathak, a lieutenant of Trivedi, a Brahmin landlord organisation meant to punish recalcitrant sharecroppers and agricultural labourers. In Gopalpur, the Bhumihar landlords leader was a mukhia and had the support of his caste brothers in the local bureaucracy, state assembly and among the MP's. Both Congress (I) and Janata banked on him for Bhumihar votes at various times and helped him in turn. The clergy landlord of Deoghar can depend on the brahmins in local panchayats, municipality and the state Assembly. Binodanand Jha, Bihar's Chief Minister from 1962-65, came from such a Deoghar priestly family. His son is the present chairman of the Deoghar town municipality. Obviously they cannot betray their landlord caste brothers. The Kurmi landlords of Bishrampur are organised around their Kurmi Mahasabha, which has in its roster Kurmi MP's and MLA's. Jogeswar Mandal the one time Bihar Co operative Minister, leads them. He helped immensely Hira Chaudhury in his anti-labour despotism. In Bajitpur the Bhumihar landlord, Durga Prasad Singh, has his pie in every buslet. A Bhumihar leader of the state Janata Party, Kailaspati Mishra, supports him. The Bhumihars in the police are for him. All this makes him invincible.

When put together the ensemble make the totality clear. When the landlords confront his labourers or sharecroppers he is not bothered by their castes. He treats him with all the vengeance of a landlord. Also, the caste of landlord does not make any difference in their vengeance to labouring classes. The state and the police backs them. But here the caste links are more useful. If the landed gentry and the bureaucracy and the police, have correct caste alignments the police crackdowns are faster. The bureaucratic help is more assured.

For the elite classes the more important use of the caste can however, be seen in political mobilisation and in ensuring social acceptance for themselves and their activities. This was evident in the backward caste demonstration in 1977 in support of the 25 per cent reservation demand. Ill-clad and ill-fed, the backward caste youth in the hot summer month streets shouted support for Indradeo Chaudhury, the accomplice of notorious Mahabir Mahato of Belchi. This is not an isolated incident. It is part of Bihar's life. In 1912, the Kayasthas organised themselves around the Kayastha Pathsala and Kayastha Samachar to voice the demand for separate Bihar. Their leaders hardly had any heart-burning for Behari workers in Calcutta Jute Mills or in North Bengal tea plantation. They wanted jobs for their newly educated sons. Their lead was followed by Bhumihar, Rajput and Brahmins. The Bhumihars had the Bhumihar Mahasabha. They invited Swami Sahajananda to lead them in their social and political sanskritisation crusade against other upper caste groups. But when the disenchanted Swami formed Kisan Sabha to fight against all landlords, including Bhumihars, the latter boycotted him. As for backward castes, they too started organising themselves around their own caste organisation (Tribeni Sangha, Gope Jatiya Sabha, Kurmi Mahasabha etc.). But they emerged as portent political force only after independence when the property limits of franchise right was removed.

This short degression of Bihar history enables us to point out an important aspect of contemporary Bihar scene : the role of caste groups and their

organisations. The caste organisations, and caste consciousness that it promotes has been used by the elites for social and political support to protect the economic gains they have monopolised. The adoption of this form has enabled them fight out the caste group already saddled in power. It also enable them to mobilise their poorer caste brothers. This then is the total reality. Social relations belonging to an earlier mode, are now being recharged and used by the ruling class for their own purpose. The present conflict in the rural Bihar is undoubtedly a class conflict. But when one says so one has to take cognizance of the role of caste as caste consciousness in its precise relationship with the classes. Failure to do so might lead to serious misunderstanding of the reality and consequent lapse in political programme to fight against the landlord-bureaucratic combine.

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1. In 1971, the districts have been reorganised into 31 districts. Here we will refer always to old districts unless specified.
2. As per the notification issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs, 1956 *Bhuiya* is a scheduled caste only in Patna, Gaya, Shahabad and Palamau districts only. Similarly, some other castes are also considered scheduled castes only in particular regions.
3. Srinivas has taken the view that politics has in fact reinforced caste solidarity and provided a new lease of life to it. See Srinivas, 1962.

Punjab : Development and Politics

AMARJIT SINGH NARANG

In terms of informal power structures in the form of social stratification, economic classes, religious loyalties, regional and diverse cultural groups the Punjab presents a case where an interaction of these factors create a net work of identity, which marks it off objectively and subjectively from other regions and from rest of India. It confirms Myron Weiner's observation that India both socially and politically is a segmented political system where, to a remarkable degree, those political developments which occur in one segment do not affect developments in another (Weiner, 1968:53). In this paper an attempt is made to identify some broad socio-economic configurations in terms of land, caste, and economic structure etc. of the state which can be correlated with significant political trends.

The Land

Punjab, the "land of five waters" symbolises all the land between the Sutlej and Indus rivers, and is situated in the north-western region of India. The political boundaries of this province, however, have been changing from time to time.

The present Punjab represents that part of a composite Punjab which came into existence in 1966 as a result of linguistic reorganisation. It covers an area of 50,376 sq. kms. that is about 1.6% of the total land of the country, and has a population of about 14.9 millions (1976 estimates) which is about 2.5% of the population of India. The population density of the Punjab is 169 persons per sq. kilometer, against the all India density of 178 (Punjab, 1975:4).

The present Punjab can boast of neither mountains nor lakes. In fact there are no large diversifications in this tract of otherwise broad physical homogeneity. With the exception of scattered and low ranges of Shivaliks situated along its northern and north-eastern boundaries and topographic discontinuities of stream courses, the terrain of Punjab plain presents the picture of alluvial monotony. It is no more a land of five rivers. At the most it can lay claim to only two and a half. Both pre and post-partition Punjab can be

described as being divided into three topographical regions, the Himalayan, the sub-Himalayan or sub-Mountain tract and the plains. These latitudinal or horizontal layers are in turn cut in a semi-vertical manner by the rivers from which Punjab derived its name. Within this, traditionally, there have persisted two lines of regional division. First there has been distinction between Punjabi-speaking and Hindi regions and second a historical distinction between the four tracts known as "Majha", "Malwa", 'Bist Doab' and 'Bhatiana'.

The present districts of Gurdaspur and Amritsar form a good chunk of "Majha" the major part of which now lies in Pakistan. The word "Majha" literally means the middle one. The area lying south of the river Sutlej bound by the Jhajjar stream in the east and sandy districts of Ludhiana, Patiala, Sangrur, Faridkot and Ferozepur (except Abohar tract) fall in the "Malwa" region. The districts of Jullundur, Kapurthala, and Hoshiarpur lie between the Bias and Sutlej River and is known as "Doab". This compact and limited area is a homogeneous unit as far as the land, climate, economy, culture and dialect is concerned. The south western parts of Bhatinda and Ferozepur forms a part of ancient "Bhatiana", most of which lies in the Bagar tract of Rajasthan. This sandy tract is otherwise infertile and far away from any of the perennial streams. It is the differences arising from the history of the regions rather than those involving the economy that seemed to be the most important factor in the development of regional perceptions. Mere history being not a very strong factor to sustain loyalties, the regional differences within the state are losing ground fast.

The People

Geographically Punjab had been the northern land gateway to the Indo-Gangetic plain. Except for the European powers, virtually every invader had entered India through the Punjab. By the same token, regimes securely based on the Gangetic plains such as the Mauryas, the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughals, and the British attempted to expand via Punjab into central Asia (Owen, 1969:59). Because of this, on the one hand the character of the Punjabi people, as a whole, has been shaped into one of self-reliance and initiative, constantly vigilant against external dangers, and on the other the religio-political elements of the diverse cultural traditions (Muslim, Hindu and Sikh) have constantly been reshuffled with the expansion and contraction of the geographical boundaries of the province. As a consequence on the one hand the prevailing form of social co-operation and the type of political solidarity bear less reference to "Caste" and rules of purity and pollution, then to the family unit and its values, namely honour, pride, equality, reputation, shame and insult (Pattgrew, 1975:4). On the other, in spite of a geographical homogeneity, a uniform historical legacy and a number of common characteristics, various economic, religious, social and cultural differences divide the people sharply.

To begin with, the Aryans, a central Asian people whose exact origin is still uncertain, moved through the passes of Hindu-kush mountains to the plains of India. Consequently there developed, in Punjab, the Hindu religion with its caste system. Thereafter, various other invaders also came to Punjab but they were either absorbed in the Hindu fold or went back. Punjab, in the main,

remained a Hindu country till the arrival of Muslims. During Mughal period the city of Lahore came to be of great strategic importance following the recurring Mongol invasions. Other centres like Multan also developed because of strategic and commercial reasons. Traders, scholars, administrators, soldiers and sufis (Muslim preachers) flocked to these cities from all parts of the central Asia. Muslim civilisation, which has always and everywhere been urban based, thus found a convenient foothold in the Punjab (Hasan, 1975:9-10). The sufis established themselves around important towns and often penetrated deep into the rural areas to gain converts. This led to the conversion of many Hindus to Islam, particularly in the countryside. The simple rules of social equality especially attracted a large number of low caste Hindus to its fold. It is also suggested that the assumption that advancement to real power depended upon being a Muslim too brought many Hindus to the victorious faith. Gradually the muslims became the majority community in the Punjab.

The arrival of the Muslims, along with the conversions, however, also brought some interaction between the two religions which gave birth to what is known as the "Bhakti Movement". Out of this movement arose the "Sikh" religion. Founded by Guru Nanak, Sikhism began primarily as a religious reform movement but was never exclusively so. Besides enunciating the truths of the spiritual and ethical life Sikhism also evolved a strong consciousness of the corporate life, aspects of which can more particularly be called political. Guru Nanak was succeeded by nine other gurus. The tenth and the last Guru, Govind Singh, formally legitimatised for the Sikhs counter-assertion and armed defence. He introduced baptism and invested the Sikhs with distinct symbols creating the organisation of "Khalsa". The Guru placed before his men the objective of "Raj Khalsa" (The Sikh rule).

Sikhism and Sikh society as they emerged from the transformation effected by Guru Gobind Singh may be interpreted as the most significant, direct and creative response to the challenge that medieval Islamic socio-religious creed and political authority offered to contemporary Indian society. In this context, the essentially mystic and non-sectarian philosophy of Nanak was appropriated by a defined social category of Jat peasantry. It became an effective medium through which their opposition to Rajput landowners and Muslim rulers alike expressed and unified in the economic structure of the time. As is known during medieval Islamic times, society's mode of appropriation of the social surplus product was parasitical in form and was based on the dependence of the direct producers. In this, given individualistic pattern of cultivation and quite a high degree of commodity production, any great equitarianism in the village community was ruled out. The relationship between the village and the ruling classes was by no means one of reciprocity – a fact reflecting the parasitical mode of appropriation of the social surplus. Very little of the land revenue pumped out of the villages came back in any form and the central state certainly did little in the way of large scale productive works such as irrigation as Marx erroneously supposed. Brian Dave suggests that to the extent that the state did promote production at the village level, its aid was largely fiscal in the form of revenue concessions on the cultivation

of new lands or lands that had gone out of cultivation or in the form of taquavi loans to the peasants (Dave, 1975). This parasitic and unstable nature of the Mughal system of land revenue extraction had created an agrarian crisis which was converted in a political crisis with peasant uprisings and rebellions throughout the empire.

In the case of Punjab the agriculturists were the Jats and were, naturally, grouped in village communities. In the emergence of Sikhism they found an institution to fight the oppressors. Earlier the Hindu doctrine of Avtarwad had made people believe that evil is either destroyed by its own suicidal nature or else by an incarnation of God who descends on earth in times of darkness. This Hindu expectation of deliverance by Massiah was replaced by a temper of positive human concern and responsibility that ultimately shaped the dynamic response of Sikhism to Islam. Sikhism conceded the Greek doctrine that successful violence, if it is successful and violent enough, does pay. It may win for its practitioners all the powers and glories of the world. Sikhism, therefore, advocated active and armed resistance to such a violence and thus attracted the oppressed Jat peasantry. Guru Arjun is said to have converted almost the entire Jat peasantry of the "*Majha*" tract and there can be little doubt that by the time of sixth Guru Her Gobind Jats, formed by far the preponderant element in the sikh community. Even today the Jats consider themselves to be 'born Sikhs' and do not think other Sikhs deserved the title of the 'Sirdar'.

The class-struggle aspect of Khalsa movement was clearly brought to fore by Banda Bahadur who led Sikhs after Guru Gobind Singh. He instigated the sharecroppers and the peasants to rise against the oppressive landed gentry. In the areas which came under his control, he confiscated jagirs or land grants and distributed them among the landless farmers (Malik, 1975:28). The Sikh revolution under Banda Bahadur misfired but was in no way a transitory military affair. As a result of the application of his methods, in course of time, the Zamindari curse of the system which afflicted many parts of India, was lifted from the Punjab. The Sikhs, thus, fused religion and politics into an indissoluble whole—a phenome-non unique in contemporary India.

With the arrival of the British, some Christian missionaries also entered Punjab. Their activities however, remained limited. Christians, as such, did not come up as a significant community in Punjab and the State, in large, remained populated by the three communities—Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs—all politically important and ambitious, having been the rulers of the region at one time, right up to 1947.

In this the Muslims were numerically and politically the dominant community (52.88% according to 1941 census) and the Urdu, their literary language, was the dominant official vernacular language. The chief mobilising communities in the Punjab, however, were the Hindus and the Sikhs, of whom the Hindus (29.79% of population) were the most advanced in urbanization and literacy. (Brass, 1975:308-9). For their part the Sikhs were a significantly smaller minority in the cities than they were in the province as a whole (14.62%). They were predominantly a dispersed minority but a virile and forward looking one.

A radical change in the demographic situation of the Punjab occurred

with the partition of India and the Punjab, in 1947. In the post-partition Punjab the Muslims were almost completely displaced, the Hindus increased their majority (about 67%) and the Sikhs were transformed from a small minority groups in multi-communal province to a substantial minority in a dual community province (nearly 30%). After the PEPSU's, merger in 1956 the Sikhs became a compact minority with majority concentration in a large number of contiguous districts in the divisions of Jullundur and Patiala particularly. Although the urban Sikh population of the Punjab more than doubled, the urban Hindu population also increased tremendously as a consequence of the post-partition transfers.

The 1966 reorganization of the state once again brought some far-reaching changes in the population pattern of the state. Almost the whole of the Hindi-speaking region was taken out of Punjab. The province not only became a Punjabi speaking but also a Sikh-majority state. According to 1971 Census, the Sikhs made up three-fifths of Punjab's population. The Hindus constituted 37.54 per cent all other religions taken together less than three per cent (Census, 1971, Sener 17, Part II—(ii)). But in almost all the cities the Hindus remained numerous especially in view of clash of economic interests as will be seen later.

The Caste Divisions : Sikhs

Punjab has been pointed out as one of the notable exceptions to the caste system in India. This is due to Muslim and Sikh influences, which theoretically are against the caste system, and to the role of the Hindu revivalist movement—Arya Samaj—in Punjab. In spite of this some form of hierarchy on the basis of caste can be noted in Punjab though in a much less rigid form than in other parts of the country. Caste was, of course, a strong element in the former Haryana region of the province.

Even though the Sikh religion discourages division of society on the basis of caste, the crusade against the caste system has only been partially successful. The caste system current today divides the Sikhs into three : agriculturists (Jats), non-agriculturists and Harijans. This division, though based on birth, is not as vicious as the tradition caste-system as all Sikhs have access to all gurdwars. Further each major caste, in large as measure, is associated with an economic category. Broadly, the landowners are Jats, the middlemen, shopkeepers and businessmen are Khatri and Aroras (non-Jats) and a high percentage of labourers, in industry and on the land are scheduled castes (Majhbis).

The Jats are the earlier converts to Sikhism. The largest number of non-Jats, the Khatri and Aroras, were mostly converted to Sikhism late, especially during the Sikh rule in Punjab and the early British period. Consequently the Jat social values have become basic Sikh values. One of the fundamental traits of Jat character has been the instinct of tribal freedom and tribal kinship. The Jat's organisation by clans is notorious and they are naturally grouped in village communities. This tribal solidarity among them was exceptionally strong during Mughal days. (Gill, 1975). Although tribal considerations form an important factor in their daily lives, the mode of production isolates each Jat

family from others and competition over land divides them internally. Consequently factions exist to provide a collective protection to each individual family in its friendships and enmities. Factions which are, in one guise, state-wide family alliances with a political object, then also exist to protect the values to which Jats are faithful (Pettigrew, 1975:19). Persons are important and attachment to principle with all the rigidity that it implies is not a factor in their social and political collaborations.

Among the non-Jat Sikhs are mainly Khattris and Aroras. Traditionally they were the trading, banking and money-lending classes, and were ahead of the Jats in education and financial resources. In the early part of British rule the Sikh personnel of the higher services were predominantly non-Jat. At the turn of the century, when the British Government started taking interest in the conditions of the agriculturist classes, the scales were reversed. A Sikh got a job reserved for a Sikh because he was a Jat Sikh and Jats benefited enormously (Nayar, 1966:197). The non-Jat, largely urbanite Sikhs, being relatively new converts and having common economic interests are tied to Hindu community and in some areas have evolved a joint culture, as for example, "Pothohar". They have often been marrying with similar Hindu castes. After partition a large number of these non-Jat Sikhs have resettled in urban centres of Punjab, U.P. and Delhi etc.

In addition to Khattris and Aroras another non-Jat caste is that of Ramgarhias—the carpenters. Among the Sikhs it is the only service caste to have any sort of political role. Here again the economic factor is of major importance since this caste seems to have adjusted quite well to modernization. Many Ramgarhias are no longer economically dependent on the Jats or on the village economy. Moreover "Ramgarhia" is a term which pertains only to certain Sikhs since it relates to a particular episode in Sikh history. Thus, this group also has a certain degree of status without associating itself with the farming castes. (Oven, 1969:119-20) In the post-independence Punjab there also arose the divisions between refugee Sikhs and the local Sikh population. However Punjab does not display the violent and explosive pattern of refugees politics so familiar in the case of West-Bengal (Nayar, 1966:23).

The scheduled caste Sikhs, who form over 20 per cent of the state's population are the former so called "untouchables" who are underprivileged both economically and socially. They form, by and large, the landless agricultural and menial labour as also the sharecropper and tenant class. Though social and castes oppression against Harijans and other village poor, which is a most burning issue in the rural scene in India, has not taken place in this state as ferocious a scale as in some states, incidents of social oppression are occurring. For instance "Nakabandis" are enforced against agricultural labours if they demand better wages or landlords forcibly take back surplus land of house sites allotted to them. In addition to caste divisions there are also doctrinal differences in various sects which have emerged in Sikh religion such as, Namdhari, Nirankari, Radha Soami and Sant Nirankari etc.

Caste in Hindus

In Hindus also, like the Sikhs, the main caste-division is between Harijans

and upper castes. Before re-organisation of Punjab in 1966 there was a large number of Hindu agriculturists—Jats and Rajputs—in the rural areas of the Haryana region. In fact caste played, and still plays, a greater role in that region. The fact that the Punjabi region was more advanced, economically and socially, however, led in the past to the feeling that Haryana as a whole was being exploited by the Punjabi-speaking region. It is interesting that the Hindu leaders of the Haryana area have found it possible from time to time to cooperate and combine with political groups which the Hindus of the rest of the Punjab considered inimical to the general interests of the Hindu community. Before the partition the support of the Hindus for the Unionist party—which most Hindus considered anti-nationalist and pro-Muslim came from the Haryana area. After independence, the Hindu leaders of this area at times directly or indirectly supported the demand for a separate “Punjabi Suba”, which the Hindus of the Punjabi region felt was injurious to the interests of the Hindu community. (Nayar, 1966:23-24) In the present day Punjab since both Hindu agriculturists and Harijans are quite small in number they are not politically significant.

Among non-agriculturist Hindus the socially and politically important caste groups have been Khattris, Aroras and Aggarwals. All these being business groups concentrated in cities have common economic interests as against rural-Jat interests. Hence they are prone to Hindu communal solidarity. An important cleavage within the Hindu community is that between the reformist section known as the Arya Samaj and the orthodox section called the Sanatan Dharm. Though forming a very small proportion of the Hindus in the Punjab (less than 6 per cent in 1931), the Arya Samaj proved a major challenge for other religious groups because of its strong posture on behalf of Hindu interests. But the common fear of Sikh dominance even now keeps the Hindus, largely united. (Nayar, 1966: 14).

Rural-Urban Conflict

As seen above both caste and religion in Punjab coincide with economic interests. This is further reflected in the division between the rural and urban areas. This has been accentuated by British policies in Punjab. After the annexation of Punjab, the reliance on the loyalty of the village proprietors and leading men, who had occupied a prominent position under previous regimes, was the kernel of the Punjab colonial political tradition. They not only provided the native support but also a substantial part of armed forces. British officers, committed to this tradition, held the view that only the “land-owning tribes” were the real foundation of the British rule. Moreover the growth of agriculture was necessary for the colonial system of exploitation as it was directly revenue yielding and also provided the necessary raw materials and markets for British goods.

Therefore a large complex of irrigation schemes encompassing the tributaries of the India, and representing the largest public works undertaken by the British in India were completed in Punjab. This opened up an area of several thousand square miles to cultivation, and was settled by peasants from the

crowded East Punjab districts. It also helped in the development and elevation of the class of peasant proprietors. But it had other consequences also.

Developmental theorists, however, failed to see the difference between the actual democratic system which was very much like a market, and their idealistic developmental hopes. Therefore it was suppressed by model 3, which came to prevail in the western world in the twentieth century. As, K. Davis suggests, actually, for all their concern with agriculture, the British did not stress means of increasing productivity. They concerned themselves with legal rights, tenures, methods of tax assessment, transport, primary processing and the expansion of the agricultural area through irrigation. Valuable as these were from the stand point of total agricultural production, they did not transform agriculture from a peasant, ox-cart type of enterprise. Instead, the British spread further the area and increased the population devoted to uncatalyzed over-manned, small-scale archaic cultivation (Davis, 1965-293).

To this, the British further added three other things : a demand throughout the area they ruled directly for payment in money; for payment in full each year (i.e., a relatively inflexible demand) and within the context of a private property structure of landholding. (Thorner 1965:124). The cash transactions had an adverse effect on the peasant economy and it almost destroyed the self-sufficiency in the Punjab villages. It resulted in great pressure on the peasantry to produce cash crops for the market, in addition to the older subsistence crops for personal consumption. As the income of the peasants became more and more dependent upon the sale of their commercial crops, they came to need regular supplies of credit to tie them over from one financial year to the next. The need was met by local money lenders and marketers, who grew rapidly in number, prestige and power. The relatively inflexible demand for payments to the state each year meant that in times of bad crops or low prices the peasantry either had to default or had to borrow from money lenders. Either alternative could soon lead to ruin. Only a small percentage of the peasants who fell into dependence on rural money lenders ever escaped. In effect the new forms of land tenure and legal procedure introduced by the British afforded to the landlords and the providers of credit of unprecedented mechanisms for bringing away from the peasants every thing but a bare minimum required to keep cultivation going. (Thorner, 1965:124-25).

As such from the mid-nineteenth century onwards whereas there was agricultural growth and commercialisation, there was also parallel emergence of traders and money lenders. In Punjab the number of bankers and money lenders (including their dependents) rose from 52,263 in the 1868 census to 193,890 in the 1911 census. From 1866 to 1874 land sales averaged about 88,000 acres a year. In the following quinquennial periods the acres sold averaged 93,000; 160,000; 310,000; and 338,000 a year. Mortgages amounted to 143,000 acres a year in the first period and 212,000; 296,000; 590,000; and 554,000 acres a year in the succeeding quinquennial period. (Davey, 1975:58-9) According to the investigations of Darling only 7 per cent of the proprietors of land in the Punjab were free from debt and the average debt was no less than Rs. 463 or twelve times of the amount of the land revenue. (Darling, 208).

Another by-product of British rule which served to worsen the position

of peasantry was the increase in population. Had there been a large-scale process of urbanization and industrialization, the increase in population might have been absorbed in cities. But the growth of modern industry in India has been very limited, and more so in Punjab. The net effect of population increase, therefore, was intense rural crowding and reduction in man land ratio. The Agricultural Commission (1926-28) agreed that by that time in the Punjab 55 per cent of cultivators had less than 5 acres of land per head. (Tara Chand, 1972:51).

The government responded to this situation by the Punjab land Alienation Act of 1900 with the aim of preventing the money lender from exploiting the cultivator. Several other legislative measures were also passed to help the peasantry. Experiments in co-operative societies, cooperative banks and consolidation of holdings were also made.

These progressive measures, instead of cutting across the communal boundaries, became instrumental in the accentuation of communal tensions, for it was felt by one community that they were enacted to favour the other community (Rai, 1965-127). For instance, the Hindu bourgeois, who dominated the Congress, felt annoyed with it, on account of its failure to take strong action for the repeal of the Land Alienation Act. They even formed a separate body of the Hindus to promote their communal interests. The immediate aims of this body, known as the Hindu Sabha, were to get the Land Alienation Act repealed and to secure a larger share for the Hindus in the public services and in the local self governing bodies. It reminded the Hindus that all such measures as the Land Alienation Act of 1900, the formation of co-operative credit societies Act of 1904, the Punjab Pre-emption Act of 1905 and the Punjab Alienation of Land Amendment Act of 1907, that favoured the Muslims, were the result of the policy of the government to keep the Muslims on its side in order to frustrate the growth of the Congress which was making impossible demands such as the colonial form of Government in India or abolition of the office of the secretary of state (Tribune-April 12th 1932). The policy of this body (Hindu Sabha), therefore, was to conciliate the British officers by refraining from supporting the Congress programme and to bring to their notice the grievances of the Hindus.

On the other hand the Alienation of Land Act, while had prevented the actual transfer of land to classes described as 'non-agriculturists' did practically nothing to stop the steady impoverishment of peasant masses. It rather created a new class of money-lenders from among those sections described as agriculturists in the Act i.e. the big landlords.

After partition, instead of hostility toward the urban classes, the government under the Congress party directed its attention toward a programme of rapid industrialization and urbanization. Nonetheless, in a state like Punjab the rural bloc within the Congress came to exercise considerable political power. Reasons for this were several.

Soon after partition with the eclipse of Unionist party and Muslim League, a vacuum was created in Punjab party system. Prior to the approaching partition and independence, the Unionist party relied upon a rural appeal that successfully aggregated Muslims and a significant percentage of Hindus and Sikhs. Neither the Muslim League, nor the Congress party could challenge the

dominance of the Unionist party until the emotional impact of approaching independence altered the political orientations in the state. However, the Unionist party, ultimately emerged as the principle agent for the political mobilization of Muslims. A communal structure consequently was available for the Muslim League to capture and utilize without the moderating effects of cross-cutting pressures. (Wallace, 1967:64).

This provided ample opportunities for the Akalis to reach the Sikh peasantry in central Punjab districts. The urban areas of the central Punjab and rural areas to a limited extent, were the nerve centre of Congress activities. The urban-group within the Congress, however, dominated the provincial Congress.

As a result of 1947 partition the League ceased to exist in East Punjab. The Akali whose base was primarily in the Western and central districts (mostly left in Pakistan) had its mass base confined to the urban middle classes and to a section of the displaced Sikh peasantry. In such circumstances and peculiar Punjab demographic structure Congress was in a favourable position. Its factional structure was sufficiently competitive so as to enable the integration of Hindu Jats and other agriculturists who had no meaningful alternatives since the Hindu Mahasabha was urban based, Unionist party had disappeared, and local alternatives tended to prove unsuccessful. Similarly it was in a position to forge direct channels with the rural and urban Sikhs.

Also, as a result of various Congress pronouncements immediately before independence, the rural propertied classes stood turned of the long term threat to their economic interests in government initiatives for social reform in the agricultural sector. In the absence of any significantly strong rural based party, like the Unionist party in pre-partition Punjab, or a visible alternative to the Congress government in the near future, the landed classes could only think of pressurising the Congress from within. On its side the Congress too was interested to forge an alliance with these castes. For the introduction of electoral politics under the peculiar Indian conditions tended, at the outset, only to reinforce the strategic position of the dominant land owning castes by enlarging their role as intermediaries. They were the "linkmen" in the constituencies, whose support was courted by the political parties because they controlled the 'vote banks' built on the loyalties of local faction members. The Congress party, which had dominated politics since the turn of the century, mastered the art of political accommodation to the highest degree. They succeeded by adopting local power structures, using the natural building blocks closest at hand. (Franhel, 1978:23).

It continued recruiting, within each region, from among those who were typically members of the dominant landowning castes. This was evident from the fact that in spite of Congress rhetorics the years between 1947 and 1950 saw a series of ad hoc economic policies that were designed to create a favourable environment for private investment both in industry as well as agriculture. The most important initiatives incorporated into the legal and institutional framework of the new political order were those which aimed at protecting the interests of the propertied classes.

The government took a series of key decisions on constitutional arrangements that set very narrow limits on the centre's powers for direct implementa-

tion of economic and social reforms. Whereas the most egalitarian portions of the 1950 Constitution were confined to nonenforceable "Directive Principles of State Policy" the operative portions of the Constitution imposed limitations on the power of the central Parliament and the legislatures of the states against passing any law which takes away or abridges the fundamental rights protected under the Constitution, including that of freedom of property. The drafting committee, in fact, was more rigid in insisting on the absolute protection of economic rights than on the inviolability of political freedoms.

As such the rural landed castes were being recruited into the Congress and its factional structure. In fact, the replacement in 1956 of Bhim Sen Sachar by Partap Singh Kairon as Chief Minister represented the "overthrow", through a coalition of rural delegates from the two regions, of the urban-oriented leadership which had hitherto dominated the legislative wing of the Congress party. observers in subsequent years noted the increasingly favoured treatment given to the rural areas by the government of Punjab (Nayar, 1966:25). The dominant landed castes increasing both their economic and political leverage, were gaining access to additional resources of credit and scarce agricultural inputs introduced into the villages by the Congress regime. For instance a survey of the utilisation of farm inputs in Punjab during the urban Revolution period, conducted by the Economic and Statistical Organisation showed that the real beneficiaries of production and irrigation loans were land owners with big holdings. The study revealed that about 83 per cent of cultivators with holdings of up to two hectares and 75 per cent of those with holdings of two to six hectares had not been able to get production loan (Times of India, Aug., 1971).

Very heated controversies have arisen regarding the distribution of gains of the green revolution. One school of thought (primarily consisting of western economists) believes that the green revolution has benefited only the upper strata of cultivators, and that the process of development has led to both proletarianisation and immiserisation of a vast proportion of the rural population. According to some of them, the small cultivators, unable to face the fierce competition from mechanised farms, are selling out their land and joining the reserve army of rural proletariat. They, therefore believe that the extent of poverty has substantially increased in the Punjab as a consequence of the 'green revolution'. Even empirical analysis by some scholars suggest that the observed high money wages are misleading because of an extremely sharp rise in the consumer price index (Kartar Singh, 1972:224).

The second school of thought (consisting primarily of economists from Punjab Agricultural University) asserts that the highly mechanised Punjab pattern of agricultural development has actually brought prosperity to every section of the peasantry and even to landless labour (Bhalla, nd, 37). Though these economists accept the pauperisation of small landholders, they do not view the displacement of small farmers and owner-cum-tenant cultivators with alarm. On the contrary they assume that economic rationalization will proceed in response to changing opportunity costs and the class of inefficient cultivators—small farmers and tenants—will leave agriculture because as "Economic men" they become aware of better opportunities in the urban sector (Frankel 1971:13). For them new technology has not only pushed up employment and productivity

per acre but also agricultural wages. Hence the workers are better off. In Punjab, for example, money wages per agricultural worker per day increased from Rs. 2.08 in 1955-56 to Rs. 6.23 in 1968-69 while the real wages went up from Rs. 2.72 to Rs. 3.43 in the corresponding period. (Chawla, Gill and Singh, 1972:204). The new technology called for more frequent application of water, fertilizers, insecticides and needed weeding, multiple cropping, large volume of transportation, and better transplanting. This necessitated more labour at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Therefore, the new farm practices of new technology are viewed in Punjab with optimism for creating more employment for the surplus labour. Mechanization in some cases might have caused some reduction in human labour. But such loss is made up by higher labour utilisation on mechanized farms, resulting from increased cropping intensity and productivity per cropped acre. Also mechanization generates off-farm employment by raising demands for machinery input, which in turn employs so many people, of course, with different skills. (Grewal and Kahlon 1972:218-19).

A third school, on the basis of an empirical study of the small farmers in Punjab, finds that though on the basis of production relations and mode of production the agriculture in Punjab is being carried on capitalist lines, the small farmers are not getting pauperised (Talib and Majid, n.d:5). On the contrary they too are doing rather well, of course, the growth in their case is less than that of big farmers. This study does not find small farmers selling land in distress any where in the state and finds very few of them to have been mortgaging out their land, the classical form of losing land. Even where there is mortgaging there is nothing so distressing about it as, in the case of Punjab, the nature of debt is different. Most of the loans are of recent origin and taken for productivity purposes.

In spite of all these controversies, there are some general characteristics emerging out of the agricultural-structure as a consequence of the green revolution. In the first place, in general, peasants carry on their production in genuine capitalistic style; that is by relying on regularly hired free labourers to grow crops for sale in organized markets with the aim of realizing profits. Also Punjab is, by and large a land of owner cultivators. Although, there are large inter-district variations, for the state as a whole the extent and magnitude of tenancy is limited to only 11 per cent of total cultivated area. Of course, both ownership and operational holdings are very unequally distributed and there is some evidence to suggest that land distribution has become even more skewed over the period 1961 to 1971. (Bhalla, n.d. 17). However, in spite of extreme inequality in land distribution, every category of cultivators is hiring in labour. Even the marginal farmers (0-5 acres) who mainly depend on family labour, cannot cope with all the operations on their own and have to spend some money on hired help. As labour in Punjab is traditionally free of customary bondage and is in short supply, especially in view of increased demand in recent years, all landowners, whether big or small, form a class of employers to counter the bargaining capacities of labour. Being the employer, unaffected by the process of pauperisation and because of Jat ethos, which includes love for land, even the smallest landowner finds himself closer to the farming class as a whole and sees no reason to associate himself with the landless labour or tenant class.

One effect of this to begin with has been the steady weakening of the communist parties in the rural areas. Indeed the CPI admitted in its review of the mid-term elections (1969) in an inner party document that a large section of the small and middle peasant (which used to support it) has moved away from the communist to the Akali Dal, and it has laid stress on the need to strengthen its base in the landless agricultural labour in the rural areas and among industrial workers in the urban areas. (Anand, 1971:28) On the other hand it has reinforced the prevailing trend of what may be called for want of better terms, "feudalizing politics." The upper-strata of the agrarian society are becoming stronger and constitute the "New Rural Elite". They have been capturing positions of power in economic, political, social and cultural fields in the rural area. They send, a large number to the legislature and even to the parliament from rural areas, and naturally form a powerful force to safeguard and promote their interests.

As regards labour, apparently the introduction of high yielding varieties and increased output, by creating increased demand for labour, especially in a state where landless labour have never been so numerous to suffer from the worst extremes of rural under employment, has not only pushed up employment and productivity per acre but also agricultural wages. But this is only partially so. True, initially this helped the labourers by increasing their bargaining power. But soon, resentful of what they consider the labourers "blackmailing tactics," the land owners not only have started relying more on machine and migratory labour, but also retaliating by applying various economic pressures, e.g. by denying labourers traditional rights of taking fodder from the fields for their animals, or additional payment in kind of fuel and vegetables. A greater hardship for many labourers is the landowners' refusal to advance interest-free loans, which used to be done, they explain for "good-will" but which they accuse the labourers of betraying by adopting bargaining tactics. (Frankel, 1971:38). In other words the agricultural modernization has tended to undermine traditional norms of agrarian relationships based on exchange of mutual, if not comparable, benefits and services that have historically provided a justification for inequalities between the upper and middle classes, and the landless low castes and Harijans. Seen in this context the observed increased money wages of the labourers are misleading, especially in view of the extremely sharp rise in the consumer price index. The truth is that the daily real agricultural wage rates have declined in all these years.

On the other hand politicization of new recruits and groups into the political process, as a result of introduction of universal franchise and other related processes, was giving rise to the development of new and differentiated identities and patterns of political cleavage. Along with the visible benefits of agricultural development new relationships of exploitation were replacing tenancy or the customary relationships of obligation between cultivators and the service castes. For instance in the Punjab, it is estimated that the number of tenants decreased from 538,000 in 1955 to 80,000 in 1964. (Davey 1975:187).

New relationships between employers and agricultural labourers are in evidence. For instance with the introduction of high yielding varieties of wheat the greater demand for labour at the harvest led to shortage of labour power thus giving it an opportunity to the patron-client relationships of land owners and landless labourer, thus, started militating against the establishment of

horizontal ties. No doubt, as a result of agricultural development the living standard of labourers also improved. But the increase in gap between farmers and them increased still more. Further, for the landless fewer options of mobility were available. Because of almost no industrialization of Punjab they were unable to move out of their localized powerlessness to the urban social sphere of relatively greater opportunity. The implementation of land reform acts passed were also sabotaged in practice. As a result the class polarisation in Punjab countryside was getting accentuated. It was on the basis of class conflict that the Harijans, especially the Sikhs among them opposed the demand for Punjabi Suba.

The opposition by the non-landowning Scheduled Caste Sikhs—the only segment of the Sikh population that was consistently anti-Akali—was on the ground that the creation of Punjabi Suba would place them under the domination of the powerful Sikh Jats who, in their view, already dominated the economic and political life of the states. (Nayar, 1966:240)

Some of the Harijan Sikhs declared that they would even launch a counter-agitation if the Akali Dal persisted in its plans to start a “morcha”. In fact in 1965, the Akali agitation against the government to demand a Punjabi Suba was matched by demonstrations of Scheduled Caste Sikhs against this demand (Tribune, Aug. 25, 1965). And some of the Sikh Scheduled Castes went to the extent of declaring Hindi as their mother tongue, in order to weaken the case of Punjabi Suba even on purely linguistic basis. Here, it may be mentioned that like Harijan Sikhs Scheduled Castes in Haryana area also opposed the demand for separate Haryana Prant fearing the domination of Jat Hindus in such a province. Thus, both Sikh and Hindu Harijans preferred to live in the larger state of Punjab where there was a large number of groups whose demands and aspirations had to be accommodated and aggregated. Political interests of a caste (which coincide with those of class also) group here overrode any loyalty to a religious group or region. (Nayar, 1966:327).

Another manifestation of class conflict in Punjab was that in second general elections whereas landed classes overwhelmingly voted for the Akali-Congress alliance, the rural Scheduled Castes in general voted against it. In view of Congress performance in regard to implementation of land reforms in 1950s, the phenomenon of moving away from Congress by the landless, in fact, was India over. The Congress leaders themselves realised it. For instance, writing in the *AICC Economic Review*, Shriman Narayan, then general secretary of the Congress, insisted that the only way to regain the confidence of the people was to bridge the gap between Congress principles and practices. The question of land reforms was a major case in point. Asserting that the pace of implementation had been slow and unsatisfactory, Narayan blamed state Congress leaders for “trying to put spokes in the wheel” and argued that as a result “the Congress has been losing its hold on the tenants and landless labourers, particularly the Harijans. He insisted that the time had come to recognize the existence of objective class conflict in India and to come down firmly on the side of the underprivileged (*AICC Economic Review*—June 15, 1957).

The Congress leadership, as such, started expressing the need for restructuring the economy which included radical land reforms and cooperative farming.

It was clear that the overall pace of agrarian reorganisation had to be accelerated if the economic strategy were to be worked out. In January 1959, the Nagpur session of the Congress unanimously approved an agricultural programme that called for the immediate transformation of the agrarian structure. The resolution envisaged the completion of all land reforms, including ceilings on land ownership, within one year, by the end of 1959. It then went on to link land reforms to the formation of cooperative farms, and recommended, in a departure from the Second Plan, that surplus land should vest in the village panchayat rather than individuals and be managed through cooperatives of landless labourers (Frankel, 1978:119). Later, the election of Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi, as President of the Congress party was widely interpreted as a shift to the left within the national organisation. Mrs. Gandhi was expected to "introduce new blood in to the Congress leadership and check a drift toward the rightist trend of thought. (Hindustan Times, January 14, 1959). Similarly, whereas until late 1957 the Food Ministry had successfully resisted the pressure by the Planning Commission to undertake state trading in foodgrains, towards the end of the year the Union Agriculture Ministry agreed to begin procurement operations.

The accelerated time table and Nehru's show of determination in achieving effective implementation of agrarian reforms, also galvanized the conservative elements into action. There were bitter attacks against cooperative farming within the Congress party. Various leaders including C. Rajgopalachari, began to express themselves against cooperatives as the entering wedge of totalitarianism. N. G. Ranga, then parliamentary secretary, began to actively organise the dissidents inside the Congress Parliamentary party with the apparent intention of breaking from the party. Minno Massani, by then spokesman for the Independent Parliamentary group and a founder member of the Forum for Free Enterprise charged that joint cooperative farming as envisaged in the Nagpur resolution would put an end to private property rights and pave the way for forced collectivization and urged the immediate necessity of forming a new political party capable of offering a viable conservative alternative at the national level to the Congress party. (Frankel, 1978:178).

Soon Ranga and Rajgopalachari joined hands with Massani to announce the creation of Swatantra party. The role of agriculturists in the formation of the new party was deliberately emphasized by the selection of Ranga, a veteran peasant leader, as president, and in the official slogan, devised by Rajagopalachari, "freedom of man, freedom of farm and freedom of family" as against the attack of totalitarian forces on the freedom of everybody. (Erdman, 1967-69)

The reaction in Punjab to Congress socialistic declarations was no different for what it was in the country in general. Rather it was more sharp as in the peasant-proprietory agrarian structure even small farmers have the ethos of landed property owners. No doubt Chief Minister Kairon expressed his concern for the agriculturist classes and made some attempts to keep their support for Congress intact. For instance he tried to compensate the farmers for the losses suffered as a result of state procurement of good grains at controlled prices. He saw that farmers were provided the facilities of warehouses by the

state to store their grains and sell the commodity when prices were high (Statesman, July, 3 1961). He also took keen interest in implementation of Panchayati Raj scheme, giving a slogan of rule by villagers (Statesman, July 5 1961). By this he wanted to accommodate the influential agriculturists who had been eagerly waiting for elevation in political field. But he was working in the over-all Congress frame work which at that time was anti-landed class. Naturally, therefore, the farmers in Punjab started feeling themselves disadvantaged by several policies associated with Congress regime.

These concerned canals and commodity prices. Indirectly licensing policies were also involved. The objectionable government pricing policies mainly concerned agricultural commodities. The Central Government had imposed agricultural commodity zones, across which trade was not permitted except under central licence. The object was to reduce prices for supply to urban areas and marginal rural areas through its fair price shops. Quite naturally, the farmers in Punjab felt that these policies were neither in their interest nor good for India as a whole. They reasoned (and assented to politicians who reasoned) that if they could realise their full prices, they would have more to invest and could increase production still further. Moreover the kinds of agricultural development taking place involved mainly increased use of fertilizers and the building of wells. Fertilizers were currently available but in limited quantity. The farmer understood that the limitation was due primarily to currency restrictions imposed by the Government of India which gave agriculture a lower priority than heavy industry. This was corroborated by the sectoral allocation between the first and successive plans to show a shift of emphasis away from agriculture towards industry. Thus whereas the government planned to spend 8.5 per cent of the resources raised for the First Plan on industry, it actually spent less than 5 per cent. At the same time, it planned to and actually spent 45 per cent of the funds on agriculture, irrigation and power projects, and 24 per cent on education, health, housing and other social services. By contrast, the share of industry went up to over 23 per cent in the Second Plan and 20 per cent in the Third Plan. The corresponding share of agriculture, irrigation and power went down to 32 per cent in the Second Plan and 35 per cent in the Third Plan. Moreover, all the money invested in the public sector went into capital intensive basic industries like steel, mining, oil and petro-chemicals, and heavy engineering and electricals. (Jha, 1980:71-72) None of these were located in Punjab. Similarly tractors and tractor parts were also desired but were, allegedly, not available for the same reasons. Wells depended on cement, which was also needed for improved household storage facilities. Cement was not available mainly because of licensing restrictions. (Leaf, 1976:201) Also the Bhakra project betterment levy which farmers wanted to be substantially reduced was kept unchanged. (The Statesman, July 16, 1961)

The farmers in Punjab, thus, started getting disillusioned with the Congress. Not surprising, therefore, many prominent Sikh Congress and Akali leaders also joined the Swatantra party. But most of the Jat leaders, who were already sympathetic to Akali Dal as a religious group and which by now had broken its alliance with the Congress, found in it a more appropriate forum to counter the Congress. The Akali leaders also took no time to declare the encroachment

from the wider society in the form of socialist policies as communal, (Pettigrend, 1978-170) directed against the Sikhs within Punjab. This attracted the rural landed classess towards Akali Dal. Now onward they not only provided a solid support base for the Dal but also changed its orientation and leadership pattern

This also provided for the radical parties, a good ground of transforming social tensions into political conflict between prosperous landowners, and share-croppers and landless labourers. Indeed, when by the summer of 1970, both CPI and CPI (M) had announced plans for a nationwide "agrarian struggle", land grab agitations were started in Punjab also along with Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. At the same time, Naxalite groups were reported to be gaining ground among "landless peasants" and "Youth". The Home Ministry in June 1970, found it necessary to formally caution six states, including Punjab, about the activities of Naxalites who were said to be planning a "new democratic" revolution on Maoist lines involving extensive class violence in rural areas. (Frankel, 1971:199)

No doubt the success of left in Punjab, like in India as a whole, is still at a beginning. Class-struggle actions, including "land-grab" movements are sporadic. Local cadres of revolutionary parties have difficulty in sustaining popular enthusiasm and support in areas where government makes a strong police response. Yet it is quite possible that the long range impact of the green revolution with greater mechanization of agriculture may benefit the communist parties to the degree to which the landless labour gets frustrated with the parties supporting landlord candidates in elections and pro-landlord policies in the legislature. (Anand, 1971: 28). In fact one of the main reasons for the fall of first United Front ministry in Punjab after 1967 was this antagonism between Akalis and the communists.

Defection of the Education Minister Lachman Singh Gill and 15 dissident Akali legislators in November 1967, which caused the down fall of Gurnam Singh Ministry can lastly be interpreted as a reaction arising out of a fear developed during the brief experience of a United Front regime of the landowning classes to the future dangers of a direct challenge to thier political hegemony from Harijans and other landless groups. The ostensible basis for discontentment among the Akali dissidents was the failure of the government to introduce Punjabi at the secretariat level. But this did not figure in the statement which was issued on behalf of the defectors. They instead made it clear that they had quit the United Front mainly because they were opposed to the presence of a Communist in the ministry (Times of India Nov. 24, 1967). Lachman Singh Gill himself, in an article, expressed :

.... The ulterior motive of the Communists was to create conditions in which the popular will to resist their stratagem should be paralysed and things could also be so moulded as to facilitate the ultimate seizure of power by them according to their ideology.... I had on several occasions forewarned Sant Fateh Singh that if he failed to neutralize the Communist domination and the Jan Sangh's resistance to Punjabi my friends and I would no longer support Mr. Gurnam Singh as our Chief Minister (The Tribune, Feb, 14, 1968).

More than CPI which like the Akali Dal, had built a political base among the Sikh proprietor castes (small farmers) the landed leadership was worried

about the newly formed CPI (Marxist). Rejecting a parliamentary strategy limited to electoral exploitation of local issues, the Marxists were oriented toward creating a mass movement in the countryside through direct organisational work among the most impoverished segments of the population, especially the Harijans and other landless sections. Although the Marxists won no more than 3 per cent of the popular vote in the 1967 elections and had only 3 seats in the Legislative Assembly, they were accommodated in the United Front government. Almost immediately the dissidents, who later defected to form Janata Party, became disturbed by what they believed were efforts by Marxists to use their official position for subversive activities, including the penetration of government security networks and encouragement of strikes by urban factory workers to provoke a law and order crisis. They were most alarmed by Marxist efforts to carry Communist propaganda to the countryside and to develop an extensive network of political cells reaching into the villages; they were further angered by Marxist's proposals for new legislation to establish an 8 hour day for agricultural labourers (Franbel, 1971:44).

Not surprising, therefore, that along with dissidents some of the prominent mill owners openly said that they were happy at the exit of the Communist dominated United Front regime (The Tribune April 7, 1968). On the other hand soon after the Gill Ministry took over, the Punjab unit of CPI (M) decided to launch an all-out struggle against what it described a government serving the interests of landlords, industrialists and other exploiting sections (Tribune—Jan. 10, 1968). On its part the Ministry not only took effective steps for agricultural development but also announced that the Punjab Government would not impose any taxes on farmers (The Times of India—April 9, 1968). On language and other such issues in spite of early radical postures its attitude remained moderate and compromising).

As such, it is seen that in Punjab religion, language, caste and class, have traditionally coincided. The economic development and modernization though has resulted in the emergence of new kinds of socio-economic roles, and identities they have not underwent the organizational basis upon which sectarian politics rests. The social structure of the state on the one hand creates a rural-urban cleavage which in turn reinforces the communal cleavage as landowners solidarity in rural areas happens to be Sikh solidarity and that of urban business classes Hindu. On the other hand land owners and labourers conflict within rural areas provide a ripe ground for the existence of class-struggle. This easily explains the success of Akalis and Communists in rural areas and that of Jan Sangh in the urban areas of Punjab.

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Rural Politics in Gujarat

GHANSHYAM SHAH

This paper seeks to examine the nature of politics in rural Gujarat. We shall study it in the context of caste and land. Caste or jati is a hierarchical social order. All Hindus belong to one jati or another by birth. Their early socialisation takes place in an atmosphere that is largely influenced by the concepts and categories that jati generates. They develop certain norms and life styles on their own jatis and in the process they also get prejudiced about others. At the same time, land—the main means of production in rural India—divides rural society into various economic strata (may be called “classes” in a loose sense). A few own more land, many own less and some are landless. Hence, each individual simultaneously belongs to a social as well as an economic stratum. If the hierarchical order of social and economic stratification is identical—as many scholars argue that it is—the task of analysis and political action becomes easy. But since there is qualitative difference between the two, empirically also they cannot always be identical. There are economic stratification within many—if not all—castes and tribes. Moreover, economic differentiations have become sharper during the last thirty years. That makes the relationship between the social and economic strata complex, particularly in the political sphere. Politics does not function in a vacuum. Social and economic groups provide a base to political functionaries and institutions, and also influence political decisions. At the same time, politics is not always a blueprint of socio-economic forces. It also monitors and brings change in the latter. There is a dialectical relations between socio-economic forces and politics. However, the capacity of politics to work as a monitor and/or vanguard of change depends upon the coincidence between capabilities of socio-economic forces on the one hand and politics on the other. This also makes the relationships among caste, class and politics complex.

I

Background

Gujarat is one of the developed states of India. The present Gujarat

State came into existence in 1960, as a result of the bifurcation of the former Bombay State. It has 6 per cent of the total area of the Indian Union, having 1,95,986 km. area. According to the 1971 Census, the total population of the state was 26.70 millions. There are 200 towns and other urban agglomerations and 18,275 villages in the state. 28 per cent of its population as against 20 per cent of India's lives in urban areas. Gujarat has a higher rate of literacy (35.8 per cent) than India as a whole which has 29.5 per cent literacy. The per capita income of Gujarat was Rs. 1,038 as compared to India's per capita income of Rs. 989 in 1974-75.

Gujarat can be divided into two regions : (1) Mainland Gujarat, consisting of 12 districts: the Danga, Valsad, Surat, Bharuch, Vadodara, the Panchmahals, Kheda, Ahmedabad, Mehsana, Gandhinagar, Sabarkantha and Banaskantha. This region was part of the Bombay Presidency before independence, and of the Bombay State from 1947 to 1960. (2) Peninsular Gujarat consists of Saurashtra and Kutch regions, having Surendranagar, Bhavnagar, Jamnagar, Junagadh, Porbandar, Rajkot, and Kutch districts. For nearly most of Saurashtra and Kutch belonged to princely states. All the princely states were integrated with the Indian Union in 1948. After their integration, Saurashtra and Kutch formed separate B and C type states respectively of the Indian Union. As a result of the reorganisation of the states, both became a part of Bombay State in 1956.

Local self-government in rural areas of Gujarat is more than a century old. It started with the establishment of Districts Local Fund Committees (DLFC) under the Bombay Act III of 1869. The District Local Fund Committee was then mostly a nominated body consisting of land holders and officials. Gradually more and more representatives became its members through the certain procedure. The DLFC was replaced by Districts and taluka Boards. The Bombay Act XXIII of 1938 dispensed with nominations. Panchayati Raj with the three tier system came into existence in 1962. Since the beginning of the Panchayati Raj, almost regular elections have taken place at village as well as district and taluka levels. Moreover, Samajik Nyaya Samiti i.e. Social Justice Committee, consisting of the members of the scheduled castes came into existence in 1973 at all the three levels. The committee is armed with executive and financial powers. It is expected to protect the interests of socially and economically deprived groups.

Like most of the states, Gujarat has been dominated by the Congress party, though it lost majority in the 1975 State Assembly. In the 'fifties and sixties' the Congress faced strong opposition from the Maha Gujarat Janata Parishad and the Swamtra Party. Till the split in the Congress in 1969, it was one of the most disciplined, well-knit and organised units of the Congress in the country. Almost till 1967, the Gujarat Congress by and large did not take its internal problems to the Congress High Command for resolution. The new Congress—Ruling or Indira Congress—was born out of manipulative politics. Most of the members who joined the new party were more interested in attaining personal power than in building up the party. Party discipline and organisational rules are absent. However, there is one pro-poor group in the party which has worked for the deprived groups. It is mainly a group of ex-Sarvodayites and

socialists who were interested in 'constructive' work to uplift the underdogs.

Though there are the CPI, CPI(M) and a few other left groups, none of them has so far any significance in electoral politics. The groups are largely localised and consist of a few dozen individuals. The Kisan Sabha, the Socialist Party and the Praja Socialist Party had also a few pockets in the past. All the 'left' groups together do not possess any significant mass base among the agriculture labourers and the poor cultivators. The non-left parties such as the Congress, the Janta, Party and the Bhartiya Janta Party are dominated by the upper strata of rural society. The parties in power have so far worked for the interests of upper strata of cultivators. The parties went on shouting the slogans : 'Social Justice' 'Equitable Distribution', 'Antyodaya' etc., during the 'seventies to attract the votes of the rural poor. Pro-landed class policy and programmes on the one hand, and pro-poor rhetoric and half hearted programmes on the other baffled the have-nots. Such strategy provides breeding ground for manipulative politics at the elite level. Let us review briefly agricultural development in Gujarat.

II

Agricultural Development in Gujarat

Before Independence, mainland Gujarat and Peninsular Gujarat (Saurashtra and Kutch) had two different land tenure systems. Ryotwari was the dominant form of land tenure system in the former. Under this system, land was surveyed and the revenue decided upon on the basis of results of the survey. The state collected revenue in cash. The land was tilled by the individual who used to pay revenue to the state through intermediaries. Generally, the intermediaries belonged to Patidar or Anavil Brahmin castes, whose role we shall discuss in the next section. But even in the ryotwari areas also there existed some "Jamindari Oasis" consisting of Bhagdari, Narwadari, Talukadari etc. tenure holders. They were mainly Rajputs. These tenures however "are a ryotwari and not alienated or leased tenure, as there is no single lessee and the whole revenue demand is collected without rebate or alienation" (Patel G.D., 1950 : 25).

The Jamindari system was the dominant form of land tenure system in Saurashtra, and Kutch. Rajputs were Girasdars, Bhayats and Mulgirasias. They had proprietary rights over their land, whereas Barkhalidars including Inamdars, Jiwaidars, Dharmadars, etc., did not have proprietary rights over their land. Like mainland Gujarat two-fifth of the entire Saurashtra area was under the Ryotwari system (Mishra R.R., 1961).

Soon after independence, the Congress governments of Bombay, Saurashtra and Kutch passed legislation abolishing various Jamindari tenures. As they were successfully implemented, all tenure holders were reduced to the same socio-economic level. The state government also enacted various laws to protect the tenants and to make them eventually the owners of the land. The Tenancy and Lands (Amendment) Act of 1956 gave land to the tillers, so that on a particular day (1st April 1957) all tenants would be deemed to have come in possession of the land they cultivated as tenants. Unlike the Jamindari Abolition Acts, the Tenancy Acts were not rigorously implemented, as they adver-

sly affected the Patidar land-holders who had considerable influence in the Congress party and the administration. M. B. Desai observes, "About half the area previously under tenancy passed into the ownership of their respective erstwhile tenants. About 12 per cent of the land held by 9 per cent of the tenants continued under recognised tenancy. A little over 2 per cent of the lands of tenants slipped from them in default of payment of compensation amounts. The rest were the cases in which the tenants either denied tenancy, surrendered their lands to the landowners or kept away from the hearings of the tribunals and, therefore, missed of their own violation to be owners of the land they cultivated on lease" (1971:123). We do not have data to identify, by caste and region, the tenants who became owners. It should however be emphasised here that owners, and tenants were found in upper as well as lower castes. "Among upper castes pure tenants are fewer than tenants-cum-owners. Similarly, the intermediate and lower caste Hindu tenants are also largely owner-cum-tenants. Only among the scheduled caste, pure-tenants are overwhelming and work out to 90 per cent. But the scheduled tribes are almost equally divided among the two categories of tenants-cum-owners and pure tenants" (Desai M. B., 1971 : 100). We shall discuss this in the next section.

The Land Ceiling Act was introduced in Gujarat in 1960. The Act was amended in 1974 which further lowered the limit of the ceiling. But the Act has largely remained on paper. "As regards progress in implementation of the ceiling law, by mid-1976, out of 52,611 acres declared as surplus under the 1960 Act, the government had taken possession of 43,721 acres out of which, again 40,552 acres had been distributed among the weaker sections. Besides the small surplus area available for redistribution, the generally inferior quality of land surrendered by landowners affected by the ceiling legislation defeated the purpose behind the law" (Pathak M.T. and others, 1979 : 175-76).

Commodity Agricultural Production

Farmers of Gujarat started producing commercial crops from the 17th century. The main cash crop was then cotton. The British textile manufacturers were buying cotton from Gujarat. In 1788 they sent order to India "for the exportation to London of 500,000 pounds of the best Broach and Surat cotton or cotton from Bengal of a similar quality" (Choksey R. D. 1968 : 128). The demand for Indian cotton grew in England after the loss of the American colonies. Besides cotton, tobacco and groundnut also began to be cultivated from the beginning of this century. "The percentage of net cropped area under food and non-food crops in 1891 was 72 and 28 per cent respectively; by 1938-39 the percentage of area under food crops had fallen to 54 per cent and the area under non-food crops had risen to 45 per cent" (Ibid : 88). With favourable terms of trade to agriculture, the area under food crops declined further and the area under cash crops increased almost doubled during the last three years (Pathak M.T. and others, 1979).

More incentives for producing more and more cash crops were provided by the facilities provided by the development of infra-structure. Table 1 shows that the irrigated area increased more than fourfold from 1950 to 1971. Canals

watered only 3.4 per cent of irrigated area in 1951-52, which increased to 17 per cent in 1970-71. The number of oil engines, electric motor and pump-sets and tractors increased four to five-fold during the two decades. The use of various types of chemical fertilizers also increased many times. Credit facilities through co-operative societies and Banks to the farmers shot-up considerably. The All-India Rural Credit Review Committee pointed out that Gujarat was next only to Maharashtra in the whole country in the matter of (i) borrowings by cultivator households from cooperatives ; and (ii) the proportion of cultivator households, which reported borrowings from co-operatives to total cultivator households. In each district, there is a District Central Co-operative Bank. At a village, or group of villages, level, agricultural credit societies function. By the end of June 1976, 97.4 per cent of the 18,275 villages in Gujarat were covered by the operations of primary agricultural credit societies.

With these inputs, agricultural production has increased considerably in Gujarat. Table 2 presents data regarding the compound and linear growth rates of production, area and productivity for Gujarat and for All-India between 1951-52 and 1972-73 with the triennium ending 1961-62 as the base. The table shows that the compound growth rate for all crops was substantially higher in Gujarat (4.44 per cent) than in India as a whole (2.51 per cent). This difference in growth rates becomes all the more significant when the growth rate of the area under cultivation is taken into account. While the compound growth rate of area under cultivation was 0.93 per cent for all India, it was only 0.43 per cent for Gujarat (Ibid). What are the effects of such 'commodity production' agriculture on social and agrarian relationships in rural Gujarat ?

III

Caste and Agrarian Relationships

According to the 1971 Census, 28.33 per cent of the workers are engaged in agriculture as the principal source of earning. All agricultural labourers are, however, not completely landless. Table 3 gives land distribution of holdings by size. About sixty per cent of the cultivators own less than 3 hectares of land. On the other hand 1.35 per cent hold more than 20 hectares of land. The government had identified 1,30,000 small and marginal farmers in Gujarat by the end of March 1973. There are share-croppers and concealed tenants whose number is not known. Who are the small and who are the rich farmers in terms of their castes ?

The post-independence Censuses do not provide castewise data and no other survey covering the whole state provides such information. Economists who have made some studies regarding land distribution, ignore the castes of the land-holders. What follows is therefore, a general pictures. Table 4 gives information on caste and land holding in some villages.

The Brahmins and [the [Baniyas belong to the higher castes. Roughly speaking, they constitute 4 and 3 per cent respectively of the total population of

the state. Baniyas were moneylenders. They were absentee landlords before independence. Now, very few Baniyas own land. The same is the case with the Brahmins except the Anavil Brahmins of the Surat and the Valsad districts. One-fourth of the Anavil cultivators are poor, owning less than five acres of land. Half of all the Anavil cultivators are middle or rich farmers. None of them is an agricultural labourer. Poor Anavils opt for non-agricultural jobs outside the village. The number of freedom fighters belong to the Brahmin and the Baniya castes who occupied political positions after independence.

Patidars, earlier known as Kanabi, are the main land owning group in the whole state. Socially and economically Patidars are not homogeneous. Patidars of the north Gujarat known as Ajana Patidar, do not have social intercourse with Leova Patidars of central Gujarat. Kodava Patidars of Surat are not willing even to accept Matiya Patels of the same district as Patidars. In the past Patidars generally owned more land, were in possession of more know-how and resources than others as today. "The difference in the resources of the Patidars and others is reflected in the character of cultivation and it is a common sight to see that the best lands are owned by the Patidars and that the crops in the Patidar's field is more prosperous than those of the other castes" (quoted by Choksey R.D., 1968 : 53-54). However, not all Patidars are well-off. Table 4 shows that only one-third of the Patidars own more than five acres of land; and 14 per cent are landless. 51 per cent of the Patidars are poor cultivators owning land up to 5 acres. Though a large number of landless Patidars of rural area are not agricultural labourers, a few of them have to work as hired agricultural workers, as they find no alternative to fall back upon.

As mentioned above, the rich Patidar farmers of Gujarat held political and administrative power as revenue and police officers. A number of the Patidars of the upper stratum were active in, or were supporters of the freedom movement. They organised two important satyagrahas—Kheda in 1918 and Bardoli in 1928—to protect the interests of rich and middle land owners (Shah G., 1974. Vallabhbhai Patel was a spokesman of their interests. Their dominant position in politics continued after independence. Since they did not have much stake in the Jamindari system, they played an important part in its abolition. In fact, the Patidars of Saurashtra were benefited by it. The Patidar tenants of Saurashtra became owners as a result of the land legislation of the early 'fifties. However, the Patidars of mainland Gujarat sabotaged the tenancy Act in Gujarat. Later, rich Patidars of Gujarat and Saurashtra succeeded in making the land ceiling ineffective.

The Rajputs, the Bareeyas and the Kolis, taken together, are popularly called the Kshatriyas. They constitute roughly 29 per cent of the population of Gujarat. The Rajputs constitute about 5 per cent of the state population. They are spread over most of the districts, but their population is greater in Saurashtra than in Gujarat. Bareeyas are concentrated in central and north Gujarat. Kolis are found in the coastal areas of Gujarat and Saurashtra. Traditionally the Rajputs belong to the upper castes, whereas Bareeyas and Kolis belong to low castes. Politically however, they act as one caste, as all the three are against the Patidars for one reason or another.

Economic differentiations are sharp among the different Kshatriya groups, as well as within each of the Kshatriya group mentioned above. Most of the rulers of the erstwhile princely states were Rajputs; a few were Bareeyas and Kolis. All States were not uniform in size. About 39 states of Gujarat received privy purses. The amount varied according to the annual revenue of the respective states. Rs. 26,50,000 were granted to the ruler of Vadodara, while the ruler of Hapa received 2,560 only per year. Most of these ex-rulers have now become industrialists or big farmers. The number of Rajputs, and a few Bareeyas and Kolis were talukdars or Mahwasidars or Bhagdars or such other tenure-holders. After the abolition of such tenures they lost land to the tenant cultivators. Their power over villagers also declined. Out of compulsion a few of them have started cultivating land but they lack training and an aptitude for agriculture. A Rajput of Ahmedabad district said in the early fifties :

It was painful naturally because we will not be able to live in the same manner as we have been living so far. So the feelings are hurt... (to what extent ?). These feelings are such that a man can never forget (can you describe them ?) Ah ! For example, if Kasanda management goes into the hands of others, we cannot have the same power over farmers and others which we had before. And also, the whole group will be unable to maintain so far because of the decrease, the reduction in income. So I feel two things : loss of power and loss of income (Steed G.P., 1955).

The Rajputs blame the Patidars for their loss of power because the latter have replaced the former. The conflict between the two began right from the Moghul period, when the Moghuls, and then the Marathas, appointed Patidars as local revenue officers. The Patidars accumulated power and established supremacy over the village inhabitants. They slowly obtained land from unskilled Bareeya and Koli agriculturists. For instance, some Patidars of Kheda district purchased land at cheap rates in north Gujarat from Rajput rulers. The land, being mostly in the forest areas, was uncultivable. Industrious Patidars worked hard and made the land not only cultivable but also fertile. Consequently, the Bareeyas who depended on this forest and waste land, lost their source of income. So they looked upon the Patidars as their enemies. And the Rajput landlords were jealous of the remarkable economic prosperity of the Patidars. They observed that "it was their land which the Patidars acquired and with which they earned money" (Shah G., 1975). Thus, the Rajputs on the one hand and the Bareeyas on the other opposed the rise of the Patidars for different reasons.

Most of the Bareeyas and the Kolis, as Table 4 shows, are poor cultivators. In fact, half of the Bareeya households are landless agricultural labourers. Very few of them were benefited by the Land Reform Acts. Because of their inferior and vulnerable socio-economic position in village life, Bareeya tenants were forced to surrender their land 'voluntarily' to landlords. Thus the Acts did not help Kshatriya tenants improve their economic life. In fact, the Acts have only reduced them from a status of a tenant to that of a "hired worker" (Shah G., 1962).

Another group of agricultural labourers is that of the Scheduled Caste

They constitute about 7 per cent of the total population of the state. About three-fourth of the rural scheduled castes are landless agricultural labourers. They are scattered over the whole state; hence numerically they do not constitute a group that is viable enough to confront the rural rich.

Unlike scheduled castes, scheduled tribes who constitute 14 per cent of the population of the State are concentrated in a few districts of Gujarat. The major tribes in Gujarat are : Bhils, Dhodiyas, Chaudhris, Gamits, Warlis, Kunbis, Kotwalias and Halpatis. About one-third of the workers of all the tribes together are landless or owning less than one acre of land. They are mainly agricultural labourers. 45 per cent of the scheduled tribe households are small or marginal farmers owning one to five acres of land. 27 per cent of the Adivasi cultivators own land between 6 and 15 acres (Shah G., 1976, 1977a; Bose, 1978). Similar economic differentiations are found within the Chaudhri and the Dhodiya tribes. However, the Kotwalias, the Naikas and the Halpatis are by and large landless agricultural labourers (Shah G., 1979). Halpatis do not reside in tribal villages. They are invariably found in caste Hindu villages in the Surat and Valsad districts. In the past, they were bonded labourers tied to the Anavil Brahmins or the Patidar cultivators. However, the bonded labour system slowly declined from the 'twenties onwards, and it no longer exists now (Shah G., 1978). The Halpatis have now become wage labourers. They are militant. Struggles between Halpati agricultural labourers and land-owners, mainly the Anavil Brahmins and the Patidars, are frequent in south Gujarat.

Conflicts also break out between the Adivasi and the non-Adivasi cultivators. Before the introduction of land reforms, Patidar, Baniya, Anavil Brahmin, Parsi and Muslim moneylenders-cum-cultivators owned large areas of land in the tribal belts. Most of them were absentee landlords and the Adivasis were their tenants. With the introduction of Tenancy Acts and because of the efforts of the local political-cum-social workers, a number of tribal tenants—obviously not all—became owner-cultivators. Moreover, the rich and the middle tribal cultivators have prospered during the last thirty years. They now compete with the Adivasis and the Patidars in the political sphere.

Thus with commodity agricultural production, traditional agrarian relationships in the rural society have undergone change. Though sharecropping and concealed tenancy exist, the bonded labour system hardly exists in reality. The Jajmani system has also almost disappeared from the villages of Gujarat. Most of the castes are no longer homogeneous in the economic sphere. Economic stratification cuts across castes and vice versa, leading to conflict. Conflicts based on social and economic differentiations are of two types : (1) Intra-class, inter-caste conflict, and (2) Inter-class conflict. The former is a conflict among the members of the same class—having similar economic interests—who belong to different castes. Such conflicts result from jealousy and prejudices among the member of different castes. The members of the higher castes envy the neo-rich of the low and middle castes. The conflicts between Patidar and Rajput cultivators belonging to the richer and the middle strata illustrate the point. The inter-class conflict is a conflict between conflicting economic interests. Conflict between Bareeya labourers and Patidar landed class is an example of class conflict.

V

Caste, Class and Politics

Politics functions at two levels: at the level of the masses, and at the level of the elite. The elite constitute the vocal section of a jati. Political opinions, values and behaviour of the masses and the elite reflect in elections, struggles and decision-making. The decision making in political parties and organisations is confined to the elite.

Overtly or covertly, party candidates often appeal to their caste members to vote for them. They emphasize caste ties and caste solidarity. It is however difficult to ascertain the influence such appeals exert on the voters. It is hazardous to conclude 'caste voting' from the mere fact that the candidates and voters have the same caste. It is important to know what *meaning* a voter attaches to his act of voting. Whether he votes for a candidate just because the latter belongs to his caste, or because of other considerations. If candidate's caste is one among the many considerations for voting, what weightage the voter gives to the caste factor? Election studies do not enlighten us on this point.

However, one can say with certainty, that *en bloc* caste voting in assembly or parliament elections is more a myth rather than a reality. Election case studies of the 1962 State Assembly elections suggest that party ideology, organisational network of the party, candidate's work record, etc., and not the castes determine the pattern of voting (Kothari R. and Sheth T., 1967; Kothari R. and Shah G., 1967). Moreover, sometimes more than one candidate of the same caste contest the elections from the same constituency. This confuses caste oriented voters. They get divided. For instance, since the 1967 elections, the Kshatriya leaders got divided between the Congress and opposition parties. So were the voters. In the 1971 Lok Sabha elections, Kshatriya voters split almost equally between the Ruling Congress and the Organisational Congress (Table 5). But at the same time, an overwhelming number of Patidars voted for the Congress (O). The division or unity in voting bore no relation to the candidates' castes. It may also be mentioned that there was no caste organisation of the Patidars, as there was of the Kshatriyas. Did they vote for the Congress (O) because of their caste or because of their class interests? Table 6 gives occupation-wise voting preference. It shows that certain occupational groups like agricultural labourers overwhelmingly voted for the Congress (R), but the votes of other occupational groups were divided between the two Congress parties. Occupational voting cut across castes. Voters having certain economic interests they identify their interests with some particular party. For instance, agricultural labourers and poor cultivators generally feel closer to the Congress (R) than to the other parties (Pathak D.N. and others, n.d.). They increasingly ignore the appeal of the caste leaders to vote on caste lines. The prominent Kshatriya leaders who were once worshipped by the Kshatriya masses, faced defeat in 1972 and 1975 assembly elections in the predominantly Kshatriya constituencies. Thus, voters are becoming secular, giving primacy to their economic interests over their primordial caste ties in state and national elections.

At the village level, their choice, however, is limited. The organisation of political parties at the village level is almost non-existent. There is also no class-based organisation like the labourers' unions in the villages. The only organisation that is available to villagers which keep them together is that of the traditional castes. Moreover, residential pattern in villages also segregates castes. This strengthens caste sentiments.

Traditionally, landed class and caste—the Patidars or the Anavil Brahmins—controlled political power in villages. With the introduction of the Panchayati Raj, low and middle castes—Bareeyas, Kolis, etc.,—who are numerically larger than the high castes started challenging the authority of the high castes. In several panchayats, they got elected in larger numbers than in the past, but only at few places they became *sarpanches* (village headmen). For instance, in Anand taluka, a stronghold of the Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha, where Kshatriyas constitute 55 per cent of the population as against 34 per cent Patidars, the latter controlled most of the village panchayats. In 1968 when 49 per cent of the members came from the Patidar caste, as against 37 per cent from the Kshatriyas (Sheth P.N., 1976). It should also be noted here that though a few persons belonging to low castes initially gained political positions in panchayats, they lost ground subsequently. This is due to two reasons. First, the upper castes and classes successfully created splits among the low caste leaders. Second, though the members of the low castes got political positions, they are economically dependent on high castes. Consequently, the *de facto* power is held by the high caste leaders who are middle or rich cultivators. In a few cases though the leaders come from the low castes, they, being, economically well-off, succeeded in giving a tough fight against high caste leaders. They have behind them the numerical strength of their castes, and they are not economically dependent on the high castes. Sheth observes, "In this village (Boriavi) the Baraiya Sarpanch is seasoned and articulate leaders. In both the panchayat elections under the panchayati raj, he had managed to retain Baraiya majority in the village panchayat. In both the elections offices of Sarpanch and Upa-Sarpanch went to the Baraiya and their allies. It may also be noted that the Baraiyas of this village enjoy some economic independence which has made the leader Sarpanch bold enough to challenge the Patidars" (247). Thus, the elite of the low castes who are economically better-off compete with high caste elite in power game successfully. But the former do not use their power to ameliorate the conditions of their followers who are exploited and poor. They use their power to strengthen their own economic position. In course of time, they join hands with the upper caste elite and become exploiters of their own caste brothers. In regards to the tribals, I have observed elsewhere, "They (the tribal elite) are interested in seeing a middle or rich cultivator or an educated person from among them as a cabinet minister in the state, to get more reservations in white-collar jobs, to organise co-operative banks which can support Adivasi entrepreneurs to get irrigation facilities, fertilizers, improved seeds and so on. They make these and other demands in the name of the Adivasis, but in practice, their concern for an ordinary Adivasi is not only secondary but also instrumental" (1973). These elite bank upon caste support to bargain with political parties. They organise and use caste organisations for their political ends.

Caste Organisations

Though there are several caste organisations in Gujarat; a few of them are directly involved in politics. One of them is the Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha. It came into existence in 1948. Initially, it was an organisation confined to the Rajputs. Later on, in order to widen its numerical base, it included the Bareeyas, the Patanwadiyas, the Thakors, and such other caste groups as claim Kshatriya status. So far, it has been controlled by the upper strata—ex-rulers, ex-talukadars, and well-off cultivators—of the Kshatriyas in general and the Rajputs in particular.

During the early 'fifties, the Sabha used the traditional symbols like saffron-coloured uniform and sword to mobilise the Kshatriya masses. "Kshatriya consciousness and unity" were fostered by invoking among them a feeling that they had a common culture, traditions and a glorious past. This had elated the ego of poor Bareeyas who aspired to Kshatriya status. In order to strengthen the bonds of low born Kshatriyas with the caste organisation the Sabha demanded, without success, the inclusion of Kshatriyas in the list of "backward class", so that the Kshatriya masses could get certain privileges as regards to jobs and education. Needless to say that by getting recognition as "backward" the upper strata of the Kshatriyas would have been quick to get quite a few benefits, as it has happened in the case of scheduled castes and tribes. The Sabha passed resolutions regarding the problems concerning poor cultivators, tenants and labourers. It also raised its voice against the Patidar land-owners who ill-treated Bareeya labourers, but it ignored similar behaviour of the Rajput landowners against the Bareeyas. The Sabha however did not organise the Bareeya labourers against the landowners. But the leaders of the Sabha got actively involved when the Rajput landlords' interests were in danger. For instance, the Sabha opposed Jamindari Abolition Acts and supported the Rajput Girasdars in 1948. The leaders of the Sabha played an active role in pressurising the government in favour of the Girasdars. Pleading the Girasdars' case, an editorial of the *Rajput Bandhu* (June, 1949), the organ of the Sabha, observed :

"For Girasdars, income from their giras villages is everything. And, they do not receive village garas free of charge. For that, their ancestors had shown bravery, shed blood and served the government and the subjects. It was the British administrators' strategic policy to encourage one class against another. In the present democratic system such policy has no scope. Besides, no class of the society should think of prospering at the cost of another class".

Besides working as a pressure group on such issues, the Sabha began to participate in politics directly since the early fifties. It supported the Congress in the fifties and the Swatantra party in the sixties. In the course of its interaction with political parties during two decades, the leaders of the Sabha got divided into different political parties. It lost its political appeal as the organisation of the Kshatriyas. Some of its one time very powerful leaders faced defeat in predominantly Kshatriya constituencies. New Kshatriya organisations of the Bareeyas, the Thakardas came into existence in various parts of the state to

bargain with the Political parties (Shah G. 1975). Consequently, Kshatriyas' strength in the state Assembly had increased from 7 per cent in 1960 to 17 per cent in 1980.

Political parties increasingly succumbed to caste pressures in successive elections. In the 1950's, the Congress party gave more weightage to party commitment, party work, etc., than to the candidate's caste in distributing party tickets. If other things were equal, the party gave preference to candidate's caste. In the 'sixties and thereafter, the party gave more weightage to caste of a candidate. Quite fresh and not even primary members of the party till the day of the selection, were given Congress tickets, primarily because they belonged to the particular caste. This practice started from the 1967 elections. For instance, a Kshatriya applicant was recommended by the State Congress Election Committee, to the Central Congress Election Committee on the ground that, "this is a constituency (in the district) where only a Kshatriya candidate could be put up. Looking to their considerable population and backwardness, this section of society should not feel neglected. So the name of.... was recommended." Such a consideration seems to have appeared for the first time in the Gujarat Congress Election Committee record (Shah G., 1975). In the seventies, the party distributed party tickets on caste considerations without any inhibition. This further strengthened the position of caste leaders in politics.

Thus, the elite of the Kshatriyas—may be the Rajput, the Bareeya, the Thakor, etc.,—use the caste organisations to obtain party tickets and party positions. Masses on the other hand, work for their economic interests which cut across caste boundaries. They ignore caste appeal if it does not coincide with their economic interests. In that sense, they have become more secular in their political behaviour than the elite.

Class-based Organisations

Class based organisations in rural area consist of cultivators and agricultural labourers. Organisations of cultivators are confined to some particular commodity; such organisations are the Cotton Growers Association, the Tobacco Growers Association, the Vegetable Growers Association etc. They pressurise the government to protect their interests—getting fertilizers at subsidised rates, protecting the prices etc. Besides them, the rich and middle farmers form their own organisations under different banners from time to time. Bhailalbhai Patel of the Kheda District organised a political party, the Khedut Sangh in 1952 to oppose land legislations. In 1968, the Khedut leaders of the Swatantra and the Congress parties organised the Khedut Mandal outside their parties. Later on, the Khedut Samaj, under the leadership of Dayaram Patel of South Gujarat, Vallabhbhai Patel of Saushtia and Ambubhai Patel of north Gujarat came into existence to oppose Land Ceiling Act and other laws related to land. The Samaj works as a pressure group within and outside the political parties, and the State Assembly. Sometimes it openly confronts the government and launches struggles to protect the interests of the rich and the middle cultivators. The following are just two illustrations to show its working and its strength.

In 1973, the Khedut Samaj opposed the Land Ceiling Act. It organised demonstrations and satyagrahas. Under its auspices, a procession of teenage sons and daughters of the farmers was organised in New Delhi which submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister, demanding protection of the minors' rights in land. The farmers pressurised the government and nullified the implementation of land ceiling Act. Interestingly enough, barring four or five members, all the Congress legislators favoured raising of the ceiling. The government rejected a suggestion of a M.L.A. belonging to treasury benches that agricultural land be taken over from the so-called farmers whose non-agricultural annual income was more than Rs. 15,000. The government also rejected even the simple suggestion of forming a watchdog committee to observe the implementation of the bill. Nor did the government take any other steps to gear up the administrative machinery to implement the Act. And the farmers took a pledge in public that surplus land would not be surrendered to the government for distribution among the landless under the Land Ceiling Act. A leader of the Khedut Samaj audaciously said at a public meeting that the Act was not going to be implemented as "the Congress governments do exactly the opposite of what they profess".

In the same year, the Khedut Samaj also opposed the levy of paddy imposed by the government under the 1973 Levy Act. Under this Act the small farmers having one acre or less land were exempted and it was progressively applied, so that the bigger farmers had to give larger share than the smaller farmers. For instance, in the Surat District, out of 70,000 farmers, only 27,000, that is 39 per cent, had to pay levy at differential rates. The farmers organised demonstrations, manhandled the Congress leaders working for agricultural labourers and took law into their hands, whereby the levy collection operation was disturbed. The subsequent Janata Morcha government scrapped the Levy Act (Shah G., 1977b).

In terms of caste, the Khedut Samaj is dominated by the Patidars. But it does not speak in terms of the Patidars. It secured support against land ceiling and paddy levy from the Koli, the Rajput, the Bareeya and the Adivasi middle and rich cultivators. At the same time, however, the Samaj was backed by the poor Patidar cultivators who were not adversely affected by the land legislations. Of course, they were not directly benefitted by them either.

Another class-based organisation is the Khet Majdur Parishad. It is an organisation of agricultural labourers and small and marginal farmers of the state. It came into existence in 1975. Congress leaders took initiative in organising the Parishad. In 1975, the Parishad took the issue of Minimum Wages Act, but it did not draw up any programme for mobilising agricultural labourers. The Parishad attempted to carry out the 20 point programme of the Congress during 1976-77. However, the Parishad has largely remained a paper organisation.

There is hardly any local organisation or union of the agricultural labourers of any significance except the Halpati Seva Sangh (HSS) in south Gujarat. It came into existence in 1961 and was organised by non-Halpatis, a social worker. It is an organisation of Halpatis, a scheduled tribe. More than 97 per

cent of its working population in rural area is engaged as agricultural labourers. However, all agricultural labourers of this region are not associated with the HSS as all of them are not Halpatis. On the other hand, the Halpatis who are engaged in white-collar jobs—peons, primary school teachers, etc., whose number is very insignificant—are associated with the HSS. Besides economic activities—providing house sites, jobs, etc.,—the HSS pursues educational and socio-cultural activities. It also demanded more wages for agricultural labourers and protected against the ill-treatment meted out to the Halpatis. The leaders of the HSS however believe in class collaboration and they pacify the militant Halpatis, when the latter come in conflict with the cultivators. Jan Breman observes, “The HSS advocated higher wages for the landless proletariat. But when agricultural labourers go on strike somewhere to reinforce their claims, the social workers intervene in order to prevent rising tensions and to reach a compromise. Self-respect and class consciousness are not taught. On the contrary the organisation does not aim at making the Halpatis able to stand up for themselves, aware of their exploitation and oppression, but envisages their adjustment to the social system without any fundamental change in their dependence” (1974). Halpatis who have now become conscious of their deprivation and exploitation ignore the directives of the leaders of the HSS. They launch strikes on their own. In the seventies, the leaders of the HSS became anti-Congress, but Halpatis vote for Congress (I). They perceive that the Congress (I) is the party for poor people.

Thus, caste organisations are paper tigers. They are created and used by political leaders to secure political power and economic advantages. The Gujarat Congress party which to some extent monitored primordial organisations in the ‘fifties succumbed to caste forces in the ‘sixties and thereafter. The masses, particularly poor cultivators and labourers on the other hand, are more concerned with economic interests than caste sentiments. They are unorganised. They revolt sporadically against the landed class. But such revolts are localised. On the other hand, the landed class is organised. It has resources and carries a great deal of influence in all non-left parties. The elites of the low castes who occupy political positions with the support of the havenots, soft-pedal the demands presented by the lower classess to the landed class. And they compromise on policy and administrative matters with the landed class.

V

OVERVIEW

Though ‘commodity production’ in agriculture began in Gujarat during the 19th century, it has become a dominant mode of production during the last three decades. It has eroded the traditional caste structure in the rural society. Jajmani system is now an exception rather than the rule in the villages of Gujarat. So is the case with bonded labour. If we prefer to use the caste category to understand agrarian relationships and politics, we can say that certain castes have more land than others; and they control political authority. But this is an over simplification of reality and does not help us in comprehend-

ing reality. Castes are not homogeneous in social and economic matters. Economic differentiations within many of the castes have become sharp in the last two decades. Economic differentiations and political competition among the elites erode caste solidarity. The elites who do not have any political base other than their caste, organised and bank upon caste organisations to win political power. The parliamentary system—political parties, legislatures and elections—is in decay. It no longer has the strength to monitor the primordial forces. Masses, particularly havenots, are becoming more and more conscious of their deprived economic conditions. But there are no political parties and class based statewide organisations which can increase their consciousness and mobilise them for political action except elections. On the other hand, non-left parties and the elites coming from the low castes play with caste sentiments for their political ends. They collaborate with the landed class which is organised. What is needed in this situation is to break this vicious circle, not to be entrapped by it.

Table-1

Agriculture Input 1950 to 1972

	1950-51	1960-61	1971-72
Total irrigated area (Net in '00 Hectares)	3481	7889	14073
<i>Consumption of Fertilizers (in tonnes)</i>			
1. Nitrogenous (N)	N.A.	12117	114170
2. Phosphatic (P)	N.A.	5293	61143
3. Potastic (K)	N.A.	383	7078
<i>Farm Machineries</i>			
1. No. of Oil engine	13540	58480	371100
2. No. of electric motors and Pump-sets	960	7900	48400
3. No. of Tractors	9480	2240	500

Table 2

Compound and linear growth rates of production area and productivity for all crops and foodgrain crops for the period 1951-52 to 1972-73

(Base Triennium average ending year 1961-62=100)

State	Compound Rate of Growth						Linear Rate of Growth					
	All Crops			Foodgrain Crops			All Crops			Foodgrain Crops		
	Pro- duction	Area	Pro- ductivity	Pro- duction	Area	Pro- ductivity	Pro- duction	Area	Pro- ductivity	Pro- duction	Area	Pro- ductivity
All-India	2.51	0.93	1.21	2.45	0.83	1.40	2.46	0.89	1.22	2.42	0.80	1.42
Gujarat	4.44	0.43	3.05	3.77	-0.61	3.88	4.13	0.41	3.21	4.28	-0.66	4.20

Growth rates have been worked out on the basis of the following data :

- All-India : Index Numbers of Area, Production and Yield for all crops given in "Estimates of Area and Production of Principal Crops in India" (1972 and 1973), Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, Govt. of India.
- Gujarat: Index Numbers of Area, Production and Productivity for all crops given in the issues of "Socio-Economic Review of Gujarat State" and annual publication of the Bureau of Eco. and Stat., Government of Gujarat, Ahmedabad.

[Source : Pathak, M.T., and others, *Agricultural Development in Gujarat*. Vallabh Vidhyanagar, Sardar Patel University (1979).

Table 3

**No. of Operational Holdings and Area Operated by size Group of
Operational Holdings in Gujarat 1970-71**

(Figures in '000s)

<i>Size group (Hects.)</i>	<i>No of hold- ings</i>	<i>Per cent share in total</i>	<i>Cumulative per- centage</i>	<i>Area (Hects)</i>	<i>Per cent share in total</i>	<i>Cummu- lative per cen- tage</i>
Below 0.5	284	11.7	11.7	79	0.8	0.8
0.5— 1.0	295	12.1	23.8	220	2.2	3.0
1.0— 2.0	464	19.1	42.9	621	6.8	9.8
2.0— 3.0	325	13.4	56.3	802	8.0	17.8
3.0— 4.0	229	9.4	65.7	704	8.0	25.8
4.0— 5.0	176	7.2	72.9	790	7.9	33.7
5.0—10.0	424	17.4	90.3	2987	29.9	63.6
10.0—20.0	201	8.3	98.6	2708	27.1	90.7
20.0—30.0	27	1.1	99.7	621	6.2	96.9
30.0—40.0	1	0.3	100.0	151	1.5	98.4
40.0—50.0	1	Neg.	—	44	0.4	98.8
50.0 and more	1	Neg.	—	122	1.2	100.0
	2412	100.0	—	9999	100.0	

[Source : Agricultural Census 1970-71, report in "Socio-Economic Review : Gujarat State—1974-75", Bureau of Eco. & Stat., Govt. of Gujarat, Ahmedabad, 1975, p. 32.]

Table 4

Caste and Ownership of Land in Selected Villages

(Percentage)

Village	KALALI Cultivators*				ATALADARA Cultivators				NARSANDA Cultivators				MANI Cultivators			
	Rich	Poor	Land- less	Total	Rich	Poor	Land- less	Total	Rich	Poor	Land- less	Total	Rich	Poor	Land- less	Total
Caste	1				2				3				4			
Patidar	58	42	—	100	56	44	—	100	31	61	8	100	22	52	26	100
Barceya	—	29	71	100	12	52	36	100	2	53	46	101	1	24	74	99
Koli	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Harijan	—	18	82	100	18	53	29	100	—	28	72	100	—	17	83	100
Total	28	33	39	100	22	50	28	100	17	51	31	99	13	40	47	100

(Table 4 Contd. 152.)

Table 4 (Contd.)

VILLAGE Caste	MALAV Cultivators				DAMKA Cultivators				TOTAL Cultivators			
	Rich	Poor	Landless 5	Total	Rich	Poor	Landless 6	Total	Rich	Poor	Landless	Total
Patidar	81	19	—	100	—	—	—	—	34	51	15	100
Bareeya	25	52	23	100	—	—	—	—	8	41	51	100
Koli	—	—	—	—	29	56	15	100	29	56	15	100
Harijan	—	6	94	100	—	83	17	100	1	25	74	100
Total	41	37	21	99	28	57	15	100	20	44	35	99

*Rich cultivators are those who own more than 5 acres of land, poor cultivators have 5 acres or less land

- 1 Vadodara District,
- 2 Vadodara District,
- 3 Kheda District,
- 4 Kheda District
- 5 Panchmahal District
- 6 Surat District

Table-5

Voting and Caste (1971 election)

Party	Brahmins	Baniya	Patel	Kshatriya	Muslim	Harijan	Scheduled tribes
Congress (I)	57.1	25.8	12.5	32.5	65.1	50.0	54.8
Congress (O)	7.1	25.8	87.5	31.3	3.7	20.0	25.8
Swatantra	21.4	19.4	0.0	0.0	2.8	0.0	0.0
Jana Sangh	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Did not vote	14.3	16.1	0.0	24.1	12.8	17.5	9.7
D.K.	0.0	12.9	0.0	12.00	15.6	12.5	9.7
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

[Source : Pathak, D.N., and others, *Dimensions of Political Behaviour in Gujarat*. Ahmedabad, University School of Social Sciences, Gujarat University, (N.D.)]

Table-6

Voting and Occupation (1971 elections)

Party	Farmers	Agri. labourers	Business	Service	Factory workers	Skilled and unskilled workers	No occupation
Congress	43.8	65.9	35.1	50.0	71.4	56.3	51.0
Congress (O)	29.9	9.8	27.0	13.9	0.0	15.6	14.4
Swatantra	0.0	0.0	10.0	2.8	0.0	0.0	4.8
Jana Sangh	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.1	0.0
Did not vote	13.2	9.8	8.1	16.7	21.4	25.0	21.2
D.K.	13.2	14.6	18.9	16.7	7.1	0.0	8.7
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

[Source : *Ibid.*]

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Land, Caste and Politics in Andhra Pradesh

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The inter-relations between land and politics, which transit through the medium of caste in the Indian context, have taken different forms in different regions of India. In some states, the changing nature of agrarian society explicitly expressed itself through caste factor, thus reflecting in politics at both the levels of Power politics and mass movements. In Andhra Pradesh too such inter relations did have the caste factor underneath all the conflicts and movements. Yet neither at the level of power politics nor at the level of mass movements they evolved on *distinct* caste lines. In this context one can note the absence of the kind of 'caste wars' which some states have witnessed in recent times.

This paper attempts to trace the process of evolution of this situation which came to prevail in contemporary Andhra Pradesh. At the outset it gives a portrait of land-caste situation in Andhra Pradesh, proceeds to trace the caste origin of agrarian movement, finally concluding with the observations on the 'modernization' process of the last quarter century.

I

Andhra Pradesh is divided physically, into three separate zones viz; Coastal plains, the Eastern plains and the Western peneplains. But for any socio-economic study, the state should be divided into three different geo-cultural regions viz; The Circars, ranging from Srikakulam in the east to Prakasam district in the west, The Rayalseema which consists of five western Andhra districts and The Telengana which includes the nine districts of former Hyderabad state. The last two regions are marked by their inadequate irrigation facilities and dry cultivation.¹ The Circars and the Rayalseema were part of United Madras provinces till 1953 when a separate Andhra state was formed with these two regions. The Telengana region was merged in 1956.

Any social study of the state as whole should note the Telengana's distinctiveness. It became part of the princely state of Hyderabad in eighteenth century

with the advent of Muslim rule under the Nizam-Ul-Mulk Asaf Jali. The muslim rule over the Hindu majority and its cultural impact, different political structure and land tenure system were some of the factors which determined a different socio-economic and cultural history for Telengana. The social upheaval of the 40s which culminated in the communist led armed peasant rebellion in 1948-51, made the distinctive character all the more striking from rest of Andhra.

For the state as whole the caste hierarchy can be divided into three groups.¹⁶ The upper crust of the system consists of *Brahmins, Vysyas, Reddy, Kamma, Kapu, Velama, Kshatriya, Kalinga*, etc. Of them except *Brahmins, Vysya* and *Kshatriya*, rest of them belong to traditional Hindu *Sudra Varna*. The other end of the spectrum falls the untouchable castes such as *Mala, Madiga, Netakani, Dekkali, Mastinu, Gurram, Dasari, Sindu*, and *Bindala* etc. Among them the MALAs and MADIGAs constitutes the numerical majority. In between the untouchables and the upper crust falls the castes now known as backward castes like *Golla, Chakali, Mangali, Kummari, Gowda, Mudiraju, Tenugu, Perra, Munnuru Kapu* etc. Apart from these caste there are also tribal castes like *Erukulu, Yenadi, Lambadi, Hillreddy, Chenchu, Jatapu*, and *Savara* etc.

In the Andhra region Brahmins, in the traditional rural society were either land owners, village officials or medical advisors. But with the advent of British rule they were the first community to take advantage of the increasing literacy and slowly shifted to urban areas taking up government and quasi-government jobs. Apart from the opportunities which the British rule has thrown up, the increasing awareness of the non-Brahmin castes was also one of the reasons for their migration to urban areas. Today there are very few *brahmins* left in the rural areas and of them land owners are almost nil.

Vysyas are the traditional trading caste. (They are also known as *Komatis*). Almost all of the rural shops are manned by them. Besides through money-lending, they also became land-owners, over time, particularly in dry areas.

The *Sudra* castes are mainly peasant-proprietor castes. The change in the land ownership with the advent of British rule primarily benefited these castes. Of them, *Kammas* and *Reddys* are dominating in terms of land ownership and social power. (Generally the *Reddys* are identified by the suffix *Reddy* to their name and *Kammas* with *Chowdary*, though it is no longer in vogue among the latter). Though they were part of *Sudras* in the traditional Hindu hierarchy, they enjoyed a social power comparable to that of *Kshatriyas* in the northern India. Both them were probably warriors in the service of early Andhra kings. Later they became farmers, some feudal overlords and others small owner peasant cultivators. Their respective concentration was more or less on the geographical lines with *Kammas* centering in the four mid Andhra delta districts and *Reddys* in the five Rayalseema districts. The British formalised their power extending the sway of leading land holders in each caste over vast Zamindari estates. During the world wars and the depression in between when the prices of both food and cash crops soared, these castes were able to benefit out of it with new riches. In recent times poverty has penetrated even in these castes. The growth of

population and the break-up combined family system has resulted in the fragmentation of the land which contributed to this process. Besides in these castes, customarily women do not go to field work which reducing the number of working hands, has also contributed to the economic deterioration of a section of these castes.

The backward castes are, by and large artisan castes like *Golla* (shepherds), *Chakali* (washermen), *Mangali* (barber), *Kammari* (potter), *Gowda* (toddy-tappers). These castes have faced, over a period of time, the destruction of their traditional occupations. Though some of them own land it is too marginal to sustain them. Consequently to day they constitute large part of agricultural labour force, next only to untouchable castes.

The untouchable castes, from traditional occupations like scavenging, leather work etc., are now primarily engaged in agricultural work. They constitute the bulk of labourers working as farm servants or attached labour (*Paleru*). Their main functions are *Neerukatu* (watering the fields) and *Bandila* (Guarding the field from stray cattle). The attached labour on a yearly tenure. The untouchables usually live in separate part of the village, known as *Malapalle* or *Gudem*.

For both the untouchable castes apart and the backward castes a system of rules regulations and customs were and are in force. Any defiance of these constraints will evoke the prescribed punishment. Generally each community will have a mechanism to enforce this elaborate system of regulations and punishments. The head of this mechanism is the community head who, when anybody defies the custom will conduct a *Panchyat* and in consultation with others gives his judgement. Every individual in these castes is governed by this mechanism. The kind of break down of the community regulations which the upper castes have witnessed has not affected the untouchable and artisan castes.

In the Telengana region also this description is generally true. But here it was *Reddys*, and *Velamas* who rose over time. Besides other upper castes like *Kshatriyas* are also, to a notable extent the land owners. With the turn of the century Marwadi traders also gradually penetrated rural areas and they along with *Komaties* also constitutes the land owning section to a significant section. Among the untouchables the *Madigas* constitutes the numerical majority in this region. Besides tribal castes like *Erukual*, *Yenadi* and *Lombadi* etc, also constitutes section of the agricultural labour force in Telengana.

II

The consolidation of British rule in Andhra with the consequent developments such as the introduction of permanent settlement in land, the imposition of professional taxes over artisans, the growth of administrative apparatus, the spread of education, particularly the English education—have all reflected in changing social life. Subsequent social awakening can broadly be divided for our purposes, into three phases.

The first phase begins with the social reform movement of late nineteenth century. Centering itself in the Circars, it was initiated by Kandukuri Veerasalingam, a *Brahmin*. The education of women and widow marriage reform were its main planks. The latter day Brahmo Samaj movement, growth of journals, the

movement against 'bookish' telugu in popular literature were all part of this phase.

The second phase, which falls in the first quarter of twentieth century, was marked by two streams, often linked with each other. The first stream was the emergence and growth of *Ryot Sanghams*. Initially they were formed at the district level to eventually become Andhra based provincial associations.² The other stream was the *Swadeshi* movement where *Brahmins* dominated. These developments lead to a number of localised peasant struggles, especially in delta areas. These peasant movements were, primarily, led by the peasant proprietor castes. The emergence of this section also led to the non-brahmin movement. In the cultural field the library movement and the revolt against the Romanticist school of literature were [the significant factors in this phase. Within the *Swadeshi* movement, the peasant proprietor castes joined the Andhra Congress Socialist Party by 1934 in which the stalwart like N.G. Ranga, Chandra Rajeswara Rao and Sundararya were all together initially.

The third phase begins with the formation of Andhra Communist Party in 1935, which comes as the apex of this half-a-century of social awakening. The non-Brahmin movement and the Congress socialist party were its immediate predecessors. By then the Congress Party came to be totally identified with the *Brahmins* and the former CSP radicals thus came to the fold of communist movement.

The significance of this brief account of 'modern Andhra's social history, for our purposes, lies in that they reflect the changing social power of the upper castes. The Brahmins who hold the traditional social power, as noted earlier, were the first to take advantage of the British rule and it was their period of shift to urban areas that the urban based social reform movement flourished. But as the *Swadeshi* movement begun to relegate the social reform movement to the back-stage, the peasant movements and the non-Brahmin movements took shape. These developments strengthened the leadership of the peasant proprietor castes in social life. It was they who provided leadership to the alternate social movements, be it the CSP or the communist movement. This particular factor was crucial in determining the strength and the eventual limitations of the agrarian movements led by the communists.

In the Telengana region similar movements occurred but in a dissimilar fashion. In the Hyderabad state all the three phases of social awakening, the social reform movement, the cultural movement and the political developments—all occurred in a short span of time. Unlike the Andhra region here the changing caste configurations and the awakening of peasant proprietor castes could not take a distinct shape of their own. Instead Andhra Maha Sabha (AMS) came up, which begin as an apolitical organisation championing the cause of suppressed Telugu language and culture and the cause of literacy, slowly acquired a wider base by taking up issues of civil liberties eventually championing the agrarian social change. It was in AMS that the various distinct phases of social awakening that we observed in case of Andhra region seems to have been fused.³ The Andhra communist attempt to organise cells within AMS on one hand and the trade union activities at Hyderabad helped in the steady growth of communist influence in Telengana.

The Agrarian Movement

In the Delta region, the agrarian movement which begun by the turn of the century eventually took two distinct political forms. One trend, led by achyarya N.G. Ranga and others championed the cause of the raising peasant-proprietor castes, particularly the cause of the Kammias in the circars.^{8a} The other was the communist led anti-Zamindari struggles. A number of local struggles, initially under the leadership of CSP radicals, later under that of communist helped in the communist party acquiring a well-knit organisation in the delta. Various sections of rural society were attracted to the party through these struggles. But beyond Zamindari abolition and issues that were characteristically rich peasant, communists did not take up any issues. Thus, eventually it remained as a movement of peasant-proprietor castes unable to catch up with the imagination of the poor and landless peasants from lower castes. It was only when the communists entered the Telengana region that their movement acquired a Mass base forceful enough to threaten the political structure.

In the Nizam's Telengana, essentially three types of land tenure systems existed viz; Khalsa or Diwani tenure, Sarf-khas tenures and the Jagirdari system. All the systems were marked by extreme inequalities in land holdings and predominance of middlemen over the actual cultivators. Among the actual cultivators two tiers can be identified. One layer was owner cultivators who had full rights of occupancy but were not registered and the other was the majority of the cultivators reduced to the status of the tenants-at-will or even landless. For the large majority of the working population, who were primarily from the Dalit castes, a system of forced labour and exactions—known as *Vetti* existed by which the labourers were to be bonded to the landowner. In the then existing situation in Telengana there was hardly any body of cultivators who can be identified as middle peasants.

The Andhra Maha Sabha started taking up agrarian issues in this context, in the late thirties. A study of the agrarian resolutions of the AMS indicates two phases of the movement. In the first phase of the movement, characteristically upper-peasant issues like levies, taxes, supply of tools, water facilities etc. were taken with hardly any meaningful concern for the problem of tenants, bonded labour. Meanwhile the communist influence within the AMS increased with militant youth leaders like Ravi Narayana Reddy, Baḍdam Yella Reddy etc joining the communists. Eventually the Sabha split at its Twelfth conference in 1945. It was from this turning point that issues like tenancy and *Vetti* were championed by the Sabha attracting the large mass of the population and with it the movement became strong, particularly in Khammam, Nalgonda Warangal districts. Thus it was with the communists entry that the Maha Sabha, which till then was 'in the hands of rich peasants and landlords themselves' acquired a mass base.

Under the communists the Sabha actively took up the confiscation and redistribution of land, under the slogan of 'land to the tiller'. Initially the ceiling was at 500 acres but later it was reduced to 200 acres of dry land and 50 acres of wet land. Still later it was further reduced to 100 acres of dry land and 10 acres of wet land. The surplus land was to be distributed to the landless

and poor peasants through the 'panch committee, constituted by the party in each village.⁷ But in the actual distribution many disparities were evident. Although no concrete study of the distribution was conducted so far the self-critical report of the communist party for the region as a whole, indicates that the distribution was more in favour of the upper peasants and the lower castes, such as Dalits, who provided strength and militance to the movement suffered. The report points out that the rich peasants and landlords dominated (the Panch committees).... and agricultural labourers and poor peasants did not get their share.⁸ This view was corroborated by other studies as well.⁹

Thus it can be seen that in both the regions the communist-led agrarian movement could not go beyond the interests of the upper echelons of peasant proprietor castes. The process of consolidation of this social group within the agrarian movement in Andhra, which began in the later phases of the movements in both the regions, took a distinct shape by mid-fifties. The emerging trend within the Indian communist movement which begun to identify the 'progressive character' of the Indian state has only helped this process. The formation of Andhra Pradesh as a state in 1956 further strengthened this process by giving an opportunity for the newly powerful rich farmers and landlords to share political power as well. It was in this context the modernisation process in agriculture began in Andhra Pradesh. The 'Modernization' period : The merger of the three regions into one state in 1956 gave a boost to 'modernization' process in agriculture in Andhra Pradesh. A random survey of selected indicators like consumption of fertilisers, pesticides, improved variety of seeds etc. reflects this process. But like else where in India this development is uneven in Andhra to an extent that the disparities between various regions and again within a region between different districts, as for instance between the coastal Andhra districts and eastern Andhra districts or between the region on the either side of the river Godavari in Telengana, continued if not magnified.

This 'modernization' reflected in the development and growth of organised lobbies in the state politics that virtually control the state assembly and cabinet. Such lobbies, primarily, centered in delta districts, operate through their political representatives. The more organised among them are the cotton, sugar and tobacco lobbies. In terms of caste this reflected in the gradual relegation to the background of the *Brahmin* lobby and the emergence of *Kamma* and *Reddy* lobbies as the all-too-powerful controllers of power at the state level. But in recent times other groups such as *Velamas Naidu* (or *Kapu*), besides *Harizans* elite, who came up with the policy of reservations have also emerged as significant, adding new dimension to the caste struggle. This factor has led to a curious development where the leading social group has to ally with or other of the fringe groups in order to gain power. Thus in the last decade at one time or other every group has joined hands with every other group. The significant outcome of this has been the fact that, like the agrarian struggles in the earlier period, the caste configurations at the level of power politics could not evolve in the distinct caste lines.

The communist movement, as we have noted above, came to be dominated by rich peasant sections by mid-fifties. The process of 'modernization' of agriculture has only strengthened this process. Thus to day some of the lead-

ing sections of the organised lobbies, such as tobacco, cotton etc, are also supporters of the communist parties. This identification of the communist parties with the interests of the peasant-proprietor castes has come to a fructifying point in recent times when the communist joined an alliance with some of the political parties, like Lokdal and Congress (U), which are more explicitly identified with the interests of the rural elite.

This gradual identification of the communists with the rural elite has contributed to their alienation from the mass of the rural poor. The DALITs and artisan castes, who rallied under the communist leadership in the late forties and on whose base and strength the communists became significant in Andhra have slowly shifted away from the communists. This partly explains the declining electoral strength of the communists and also perhaps, the continued electoral success of Indira Gandhi, who is perceived as the 'new saviour' of the oppressed.

This factor also reflected in the significant agrarian movements of the state in post-independence period. These, movements the Srikakulam tribal revolt and the recent peasant resurgence in Karimnagar and Adilabad districts, have occurred in the areas which fall outside the 'modernization' process. These movements led by the CPI(M-L) groups indicates that the Dalits and other lower castes who constitutes the bulk of the poor peasants and landless labourers, are in search of new leadership. In this context, it is significant to note that where these revolutionary groups are struggling to gain a foothold in the developed areas of the former communist strong holds it is leading to a violent conflict between the traditional left and the revolutionary left.

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1. Irrigated area as percentage to total net sown is as follows :

Region	%
Circars	34.7
Rayalseema	6.9
Teleugana	6.4

(Source ; Agricultural Census Report. 1971 p. 47.)

- 1A. This division is based on popular perception of caste hierarchy. In the traditional structure Brahmins falls into upper caste and rest of the castes mentioned in the upper crust here falls lower in the hierarchy.
2. The RYOT sangham was first formed in Krishna district, in the delta, and latter the sanghams came up in other districts eventually leading to the formation of Andhra Provincial Ryots Association in 1928. See among others, Krishna Rao, 1981.
3. For an analytical account of various trends present in AMS, see, Rao, D.V. et. al. 1944.
- 3A. The split between communists and Acharya Ranga, in CSP took place in 1935. The former championing the peasant units against the Zamindars carried with them the large majority whereas Ranga confined himself, broadly, to the cursing rich peasant proprietor caste.
4. The role of communist party cultural organisation Praja Natya Maadali and Abyudaya Rachyatala Sangham here should be noted in spreading the influence of the communists.

5. For chronological list of the agrarian resolutions of AMS, see Rajeswara Rao, Ch. et.al 1973.
6. Ibid p. 36
7. From the report of "Land distribution in Telengana Mistakes and Future Programme" by the state fraction of the Andhra CPI.
8. Ibid pp. 2-4.
9. See Pulla Reddy, 1968 p. 36 and Sundarayya pp. 58-61 and 116-118.
10. In fact as early as 1947 the Andhra CP (not Telengana) felt a need to issue a circular to all its members warning them not get 'drowned in the capitalist wave' by investing in big enterprises but confine themselves only to small investments (Picchayaiah, 1948). Later in the discussion over the fourth party resolution, Ravi Narayana Reddy was prominent among those who characterised the Nehru government as 'anti-feudal'. See Narayana Reddy, 1955.
11. In one sense this completes the circle for the Andhra communist leadership who begun with a departure from the rich peasant sections in CSP in 1934 and now reaching back to the same sections in the left front. Interestingly even some of the personalities remained same like Sundaraya, Rajeswara Rao and Gouthi Lachanna.

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INDEX OF NAMES

A

Abbasayalu, Y.B., 48b
 Acharaya, Ramanuj, 110
 Aiyappan, A., 48b
 Alagh, Y.K., 52, 161b
 Alavi, Hamza, 43b
 Alexander, K.C., 45b
 Alice, 45b
 Ambedkar, B.R., 11, 23-25, 42b
 Anand, J.C., 126, 130, 131b
 Arjun, Guru, 117

B

Baden, 71, 85b
 Bahadur, Banda, 117
 Bailey, Frederick, 42b
 Banerjee, Sumanta, 45b
 Barnett, M. Ross, 49b
 Barnett, Stephen, 42b
 Bateille, Andre, 15, 42b, 43b, 100
 Bearce, George D., 68, 85b
 Beidelman, T. C., 42b
 Benett, W.C., 67, 72, 85b
 Bentinct, Lord, 67
 Berman, Jan, 43b, 46b
 Berreman, Gerald, 42b
 Bhalla, G.S. 52, 61b, 124-5, 131b
 Bhargava, M.L., 66, 86b
 Bhatt, Anil, 154b
 Bhattacharya, Janabrata, 45b
 Bhusan, Shashi, 45b
 Billings, Masten, 132
 Bird, R.M., 68, 73, 77-8
 Bose, Pradip Kumar, 154b
 Brass, Paul, 46b, 117, 132b
 Breman, Jan, 147, 154b
 Brown, Judith, 46b
 Byres, Terry, 44b.

C

Chakravarty, Anand, 82, 85b
 Chakrabarti, Prafulla, 101b

Chand, Tara, 122, 133b
 Chatterjee, Partha, 81, 101b
 Chattopadhyay, Manabendu, 101b
 Chattopadhyay, Paresh, 46b
 Chattopadhyay, Suhas, 46b
 Chaturvedi, M.D., 66, 85b
 Chaudhury, Hira, 111
 Chaudhury, Indradeo, 110-1
 Chawla, J.S., 125, 132b
 Chitra, 45b
 Choksey, R.D., 137, 139, 154b
 Chwodary, K., 163b
 Clarke, Richard 73
 Cohn, Bernard, S., 101b
 Cox, J.A., 73
 Crowley, W.F., 46b
 Currie, Kate, 41n, 44b
 Currie, R.G., 67, 72, 85b

D

Darling, M.S., 121, 132b
 Das, Arvind, 106-7, 112b
 Das, Basant, Kumar, 91
 Das, C.R., 91
 Daula, Asaf-ud, 66
 Davey, Brian, 117, 121, 126, 132b
 Davis, K, 121, 132b
 Desai, A.R., 25, 46b
 Desai, K.D., 154b
 Desai, M.B., 137, 154b
 Desai, M.D., 154b
 Dev, Acharya Narendra, 106
 Dhanagare, D.N., 46b, 18, 86b
 Dhar, Hiranmay, 102
 Dube, S.C., 163b
 Dumont, Louis, 41n, 43b
 Dumont, Rene, 62, 86b
 Dushkin, Lelah, 49b

E

Elder, Joseph, 63, 86b

F

Fox, Richard, 44b
 Franda, 46b

n=note, b=bibliography

Frankel, Francine, 46b, 123-4, 126,
128, 130-1, 132b
Frdman, Howard I, 128, 132b

G

Gandhi, Indira, 10, 28, 109, 128, 162
Gandhi, Mahatma, 23-25, 64, 78, 105
Gardezi, Hassan, 15, 41n 44b
Ghosh, Anrjan, 46b, 101b
Ghosh, Atulya, 93
Ghurye, G.S., 53, 61b
Gill, Lachman Singh, 130, 131
Gill, Pritam Singh, 118, 132b
Gill, S.S., 125, 132b
Godelier, M., 57, 61b
Gol, 72
Gough, Kathleen, 15, 41n, 42n, 43b,
46b, 49b
Govind, Guru Her, 117
Grewal, S.S., 125, 132b
Guha, Ranjit, 101b
Gupta, Dipankar, 154
Gupta, Shaibal, 102

H

Harcourt, Max, 16, 46b
Harper, H.B., 49b
Harrison, S.S., 163b
Hasan, Mushiral, 116, 132b
Hassan, Nurul, 66
Hastings, Warren, 66
Hauser, Walter, 106, 112b

I

Inden, Ronald, 12, 41n, 43b
Irschick, Eugene, 49b

J

Jain, Ajit Prasad, 78
Jain, R.K., 66, 86b
Jeffrey, Robin, 49b
Jha, B.N., 108-9, 111
Jha, H., 112b
Jha, Prem Shanker, 129, 132b
Jha, Shashisekhar, 112b
Jose, A.V., 45b
Josh, Bhagwan, 132b
Joishi, P.C., 62, 63, 69, 86b
Juergenmeier, Mark, 49b

K

Kahlon, A.S., 125, 132b
Kairon, Pratap Singh, 124
Karve, Irawati, 12
Keer, Dhananjay 49b
Khan, Saadat Ali, 66
Klass, Morton, 11-12, 16, 41n, 43b
Kosambi, D.D., 15, 41n, 44b

Kothari, Rajni, 43b, 142, 154b
Krishnaji, N., 47b
Kumar, Kapil, 47b

L

Leach, Edmund, 43b
Leaf, Murray J., 129, 133b
Lohia, Rammanohar, 109
Lucas, Samuel, 66, 86b
Lynch, Owen, 49b

M

Mackenzie, Holt, 68, 72, 85b
Mahar, J. Michael, 49b
Mahato, Bidni, 110
Mahato, Mahabir, 110-1
Maine, Sir Henry, 41n
Majid, A, 125, 133b
Majumdar, R.C., 66, 86b
Malik, Arjun Das, 117, 133b
Mandal, B.P., 107, 109
Mandal, Jogeswar, 111
Mao, Tse tug, 55, 61b
Marriott, Mokim, 12, 41n, 43b
Maru, Rushikesh, 154b
Marx, Karl, 13, 54, 58
Massani, Minno, 128
Meillaisou, Claude, 43b
Mencher, Joan, 15, 43b, 44b
Menon, Saraswati, 47b
Metcalf, T.R., 66, 67-9, 78, 86b
Mies, Maria, 47b
Mill, James, 67, 69, 78, 86b
Mill John Stuart, 67-68, 86b
Millet, A.F., 67, 72, 85b
Mishra, Girish, 106, 108, 112b
Mishra, Kailaspati, 111
Mishra, L.N., 109
Mishra, R.R., 136, 154b
Mishra, Ramanand, 106
Mitra, A., 103-4, 112b
Mittal, S., 47b
Mitter, Swasti, 47b
Moffat, Michael, 49b
Morgan, T.H., 72, 86b
Mukherjee, Kalyan, 47b, 105, 112b
Mukherjee, Parth, 47b, 101b
Mukhopadhyay, Asim, 47b
Murugesan K., 24, 47b

N

Namboodiripad, E.M.S., 57, 61b
Nanak, Guru, 116
Narang, Amarjeet Singh, 114
Narayan, B.K., 163b
Narayan, Hamendra, 47b
Narayan, Keshav, 163b
Narayan, Shriman, 127

Nayar, Baldev Rai, 119-120, 127, 133b
 Noale, Walker, 16, 44b, 66, 68, 71, 73, 78, 86b

Nehru, J.L., 78, 109, 128

Nevill, H.R., 85b

Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jali, 157

O

O'Malley, L.S.S., 103, 112b

Omen, T.K., 47b

Omvedt, Gail, 9, 26, 29, 41n, 44b, 49b, 63-65, 69, 84, 86b

Oven, Stephen A., 115, 119, 133b

P

Pant, Govind Ballabh, 78

Patankar, Bharat, 9n, 49b, 63-65, 69, 84, 86b

Parekh, M.G., 154b

Patel, Ambubhai, 145

Patel, B.C., 107

Patel, Bhailabhai, 145

Patel, G.D., 136, 154b

Patel, M.F., 154b

Patel, Sardar Vallabhbhai, 107, 139, 145

Patel Surendra, 44b

Pathak, D N., 142, 153, 154b

Pathak, M.T., 137, 149, 154b

Pathak, Srikant, 111

Pathy, Jagannath, 51, 55, 61b

Pathnaik, S.C., 61n

Pathnaik, Utsa, 44b

Pavier, Barry, 47b

Pavlov, V.I., 15, 17-18, 44b

Pemble, John, 66, 69, 78, 86b

Perlin, 17

Pettigrew, Joyce, 119, 133b

Phule, Jotirao, 11

Picchayaiah, C., 163n, 164b

Pouchepedass, Jacques, 47b

Powell, 71, 85b

Prasad, Jagdeo, 109

Prasad, Mahamaya, 108-109

Prasad, Pradhan, 47b, 103, 108, 112b

Prasad, R.C., 107

Prasad, Rajendra, 105-7, 112b

Q

Quareshi, A.I., 163b

R

Rai, Daroga Prasad, 109

Rai, Nawrang, 104

Rai, Satya, M., 122, 133b

Rajgopalachari, C., 128

Ram, Jagjivan, 23, 25, 106

Ram. N., 50b

Ramakrishna, V., 163b

Ramalingachari, V., 164b

Ramaswamy, Uma, 50b, 163b

Ranadive, B.T., 43b

Ranga, N.G., 47b, 128, 159, 160, 162n, 164b

Rao, Chandra Rajeswara, 159, 162n, 164b

Rao, D.V., 164b

Rao, K., Ranga, 47b

Rao, Krishna, 162n, 164b

Rao, M.S.A., 47b, 50b

Rao, Prasada, 163b

Rao, Vasudeva, 163b

Rasul, M.A., 23, 48b

Reddy, Baddam, Yella, 160

Reddy, Pulta, 163b, 164b

Reddy, Ravi Narayana, 160, 163b, 164b

Ricardo, David, 66

Richarp, Clarke, 85b

Risley, H.H., 11

Rizvi, A.A., 66, 86b

Roy, Bidhan Chandra, 93

Roy, Nandulal, 102

Roy, Ramashray, 103, 113b

Ruddlph, Lloyd, 43b

Rudra, A., 45b

S

Sachar, Bhim Sen, 124

Sahay, Harnivas, 107

Sahay, K.B., 107-8

Sahay, Shyam Nandan, 108

Sankritayan, Rahul, 106

Sanyal, Hitesharyan, 91, 101b

Saradhi, Partha, 163b

Saraswati, Swami Sahajanand, 104-6, 111

Sasmal, Birendranath, 91

Schwartzberg, Joseph E., 101b

Sen, Bhawani, 62, 86b

Sengupta, Bhabani, 48b

Sengupta, Nirmal, 15, 48b, 102, 104, 106-7, 112b, 113b

Seth, P.N., 154b, 155b

Shah, C.H., 155b

Shah, Ghanshyam, 50b, 134, 139-42, 145-6, 154b

Shah, Vimal, 155b

Sharma, Hari, 45b

Sharma, K.I., 48b

Sharma, K.L., 77, 86b

Sharma, Karyanand, 106

Sharma, R.S., 41n, 45b

Shastri, Bhola Paswan, 109

Shekhar, Chandra, 110

Sheth, T., 142, 154b

- Shetty, V.T., Rajshekhar, 50b
 Siddiqui, M.N., 48b, 77, 79, 86b
 Silverberg, J., 49b
 Singer, Milton, 101b
 Singh, A., 132b
 Singh, Arjun, 125, 132b
 Singh, Bayinath, 105
 Singh, Baswan, 107
 Singh, Charan, 75, 78, 86b, 109
 Singh, Deo Narain, 107
 Singh, Durga Pd., 111
 Singh, Fateh, 130
 Singh, Govind, 116-7
 Singh, Gurnam, 130
 Singh, Hira, 69, 76b
 Singh, Hukum, 78
 Singh, K. S., 45b
 Singh, Kartar, 124, 132
 Singh, Kashi Nath, 71, 87b
 Singh, Kumar Ganganand, 108
 Singh, L P., 107
 Singh, R.P., 132b
 Singh, Raja Chait, 66
 Singh, Rajandhari, 108
 Singh, Rajendra, 15, 16, 48b, 62, 63, 69, 72-5, 77, 79, 83, 87b
 Singh, Sarangdhar, 107
 Singh, Sardar Harihar, 107
 Singh, Satish Prasad, 109
 Singh, Sir Ganesh Dutt, 104-5
 Singh, Yogendra, 63, 87b
 Singh, A. N., 106-8
 Singh, Arun, 48b
 Singh, Dharm Vir, 109
 Sinha, H. N., 107
 Sinha, J. P., 109
 Sinha, K. K., 108
 Sinha, Mahesh Pd., 107-8
 Sinha, S. K., 106-9
 Sinha, Sachchidananda, 104-5
 Sinha, Satyendra Narayan, 108-9
- Sivkumar, S. S., 15, 45b
 Somjee, A. H., 155b
 Srinivas, M. N., 43b, 47b, 113b
 Srivastava, Arun, 48b
 Steed, G. P., 140, 155b
 Stephen, 49b
 Stokes, Eric, 41n, 45n, 66-7, 71, 87b
 SubbaRao, C. V., 48b, 156
 Subramanyam, K.S., 24
 Sundarrrya, P. 41b, 159, 164b
- T
- Talib, S. S., 125, 132b
 Tewari Ramanand, 109
 Thakur, Karpoori, 105, 109-10
 Thomason, James, 68, 77-8
 Thorner, Daniel, 16, 45b, 62, 68, 87b, 121, 133b
 Thurston, Edger, 163b
 Tripathi, Kamlapati, 78
 Trivedi, Jagnarayan, 110-11
- U
- Upadhayay, Ashok, 48b
- V
- Vaidehi, Alladi, 163b
 Venkatarangayya, M., 164b
 Verma, K. K., 103, 113b
 Vyas, V. S. 155b
- W
- Wallace, Paul, 123, 133b
 Weiner, Myron, 114
 Wingfield, Charles John, 78
 Wynne, Le P. H., 67, 72, 85b
- Y
- Yadav, H. N., 107
 Yadav, Ram Jaipal Singh, 109
 Yadav, Ram Lakhan Singh, 108
- Z
- Zelliott, Eleanor, 50b